BOY SCOUTS OF THE AIR

AT CAPE PERIL

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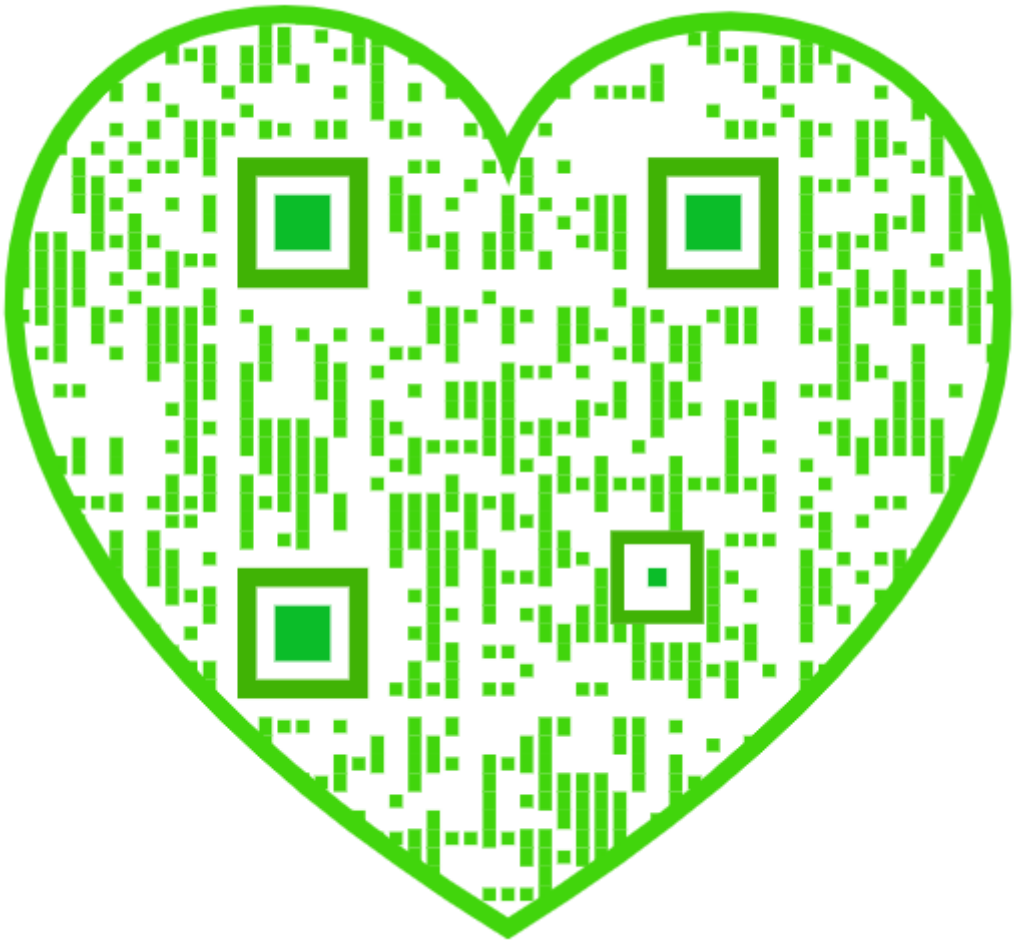

Boy Scouts of the Air Books

The Boy Scouts of the Air At Cape Peril

The Boy Scouts of the Air At Cape Peril

BY
GORDON STUART

Frontispiece by Harry W. Armstrong

The Reilly & Lee Co.
Chicago

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The Boy Scouts of the Air At Cape Peril

CHAPTER I

STARTING THE ADVENTURE

In the second car of an electric train racketing on its way to the seashore, sat three boys in scout costume. Two sat side by side, while the third, twisted around in the seat just in front, was facing them and talking with an animation that arrested the attention and excited the merriment of the non-scout passengers near him.

"I say, it's a shame to make a catfish travel on a motorcycle while you two landlubbers take the Seaboard Airline to Cape Peril."

The speaker's fascinatingly homely face was almost sliced in two by a capacious mouth, which, when open, revealed snaggly teeth with gaps

between, the whole effect offering a ludicrous resemblance to the denizen of the deep he had just mentioned.

"Well, we matched for the airplane rides, didn't we?" retorted a round-eyed, smooth-cheeked youngster, whose slender figure, when erect, must have been at least six feet one. "Take your medicine like a scout and close up that Mammoth Cave of yours."

"That's right, Legs, hand it to him good and straight," approved the companion by his side, dark of hair, swarthy of complexion, stocky in build, and a good foot and a half shorter than the other. "Nothing's ever settled with Cat Miller. Might know his daddy was a politician. Button up your mouth, Cat, button up your mouth."

Regardless of this admonition, Cat grinned like a Billikin and then came back, "That's all right, Legs Hatton, you and Jimmy Todd, you better take a lesson from my dad and from me too. I got you fellows this trip, didn't I?"

"Doggone right you did," conceded Jimmy, speedily changing his tone to one of appreciation, "and, Cat, old boy, you're some getter!

A fellow doesn't get a treat like this every day. Gee! It's great to go camping without having to take a thing along except one little knapsack full, and to be able to chase around all day with nothing on but trunks! We'll be regular Indians. Won't take us long to look as sweet as we did when we got home from school after scrapping through that Paradise Alley gang. Remember that bunch, Cat?" Jimmy grinned at his friend.

"Do I? Well, I should smile. Look here, see this little souvenir over my left eye one of those suckers handed me with a brickbat? I reckon I do remember 'em."

"Ye-ah, and I tried to stop the blood with a piece of brown paper while you were yelling like murder," returned Jimmy, glowing with these memories of his early youth, "and gee! When I got home, Mother wanted to know why in thunder I was so bloody, and I asked her how she expected a fellow to keep clean when he had to fight his way from school every day through a gang of hoboes. Gosh! those Paradise Alleycats were lulus. A white collar and a clean shirt set those guys wild, same as a

red rag does a bull. Redhot times those were, you bet."

"Pretty lively times now," remarked Legs soberly. "Going up in an airplane ain't so slow. Say, Cat, pity about you!"

Cat winked one eye and then the other and grinned knowingly as if he were possessed of an important and highly amusing secret which he was inwardly enjoying.

"Look here, fellows," he said finally, "I'm not sore because you two drew the plane this time." And then he added in a low and mysterious tone, "Know sumpthin'? I've been up in one already."

"Yes, you have!" returned Jimmy sarcastically. "Over the left!"

"*Yes, I have,*" affirmed Cat staunchly. "I cross my heart, and I can prove it just as soon as we get back to town."

Jimmy snorted derision.

"Come off, Cat," objected Legs. "You know you couldn't have kept that secret five minutes."

"Believe it or not, I don't give a hang," snapped Cat sourly, "but listen to this, will you?"

"Shoot!" directed Jimmy, who began to be interested despite his incredulity.

Legs cocked his head on one side and screwed up his eyes as if to hear a Munchausen fable.

"Know that guy that flew people over town for fifteen bucks a fly? Well, every afternoon I used to trot out to his field and hang around watching him. After a while, I got to talking planes and, when he found I wasn't any bone-head on flyers, he gave me a lot of new dope. I'd spent 'bout ten afternoons hanging around when he said day before yesterday, 'Look here, young fellow, how'd you like to take a little sky ride? Business seems to be slack, so I might as well make you happy.' My heart turned a somerset, but I looked kind of shy and said, 'Haven't got the price, but I'd give my head to go up.' 'How much have you in your jeans?' he asked me. Then I said, 'Two bits and a jit.' 'All right,' he said, 'I'll take that. Come along.' Course he was just fooling about the dough. Then he remembered and wanted to know if I could get permission from home right quick. Quick as lightning, I reached down in my pants and fished out a note from the

old man saying I could go any old time I got a chance. He laughed like the mischief, and said I was some slick kid and wouldn't have to have anybody to lead me 'round the world. You see, fellows, I knew I was going to work it sooner or later, so, to save time, I got dad the first night to write me a note saying I could go. Gee! You ought to have seen him grin, and he said if I could get a fifteen dollar ride for a little scrap of paper, I sure would make a killing as a lawyer when I grew up. Well, I got my fly, and great day, man! Talk about fun!"

As Cat paused at this point for the applause of his audience, he gave Jimmy a chance to get in a word.

"Swear this is so?"

"If it's not, I hope I may be struck dead right this minute. What would I want to fool you for?"

"Gee, man!" was Legs's fervent exclamation.

"Well," declared Jimmy, "you sure did do us a dirty trick not telling us sooner. We fellows might have pulled off that stunt like you did."

"I don't see how that big mouthed buzzard managed to keep it in this long, that's what gets my goat," observed Legs.

Cat grinned. "You bet I'd 'a spread it all over this U. S. A. if he hadn't made me promise to keep it on the q. t. till he got away. Said he didn't want to be pestered, and he didn't expect to ride a single 'nother kid free. See? Well, he's pulling out to-day just about this time, so I can loosen up on it. See?"

"Golly, Cat!" exclaimed Jimmy, now fully convinced and looking at the new birdman with undisguised admiration. "Say, fellow, what did it feel like?"

To his intensely absorbed scout audience, not to mention certain grown individuals on the side lines, he recounted, in his most humorous style, his varied sensations and experiences during the flight.

"Is Mr. Hardy just as good a pilot as that one?" asked Legs eagerly, after Cat was apparently on the point of exhausting his narrative.

"Big sight better," he asserted.

"How did your father get in with him?" queried Jimmy.

"Listen! You know Father he's had airplanes on the brain ever since the Wright brothers pulled off their experiments on the North Carolina coast way back yonder before we were born. He's read every darn thing he could lay his hands on about flying. He's been up every time he could beg or buy an air ride, and, when the war came on, he was crazy as a Junebug to get in as a pilot, but of course he got turned down because he was too old and his eyes are bum. See? Well, while he was fooling and fussing around trying to buck into the service, he ran across Hardy and they've been buddies ever since, though my dad's about twenty years older. Now, my old man is some horse pulling wires. See? And when he heard about that N. C. Topographical Coast Survey, his pull landed the job for Hardy—I call him Tom behind his back."

"State Top—what? Whew!" whistled Jimmy. "Jiminy, that's a jawbreaker."

"You can listen, but don't try to handle," proclaimed Cat with mock solemnity. "Now, listen some more and I'll teach you something. You know surveyors used to trot all over the

country with rods and a lot of junk and take about five years to survey one measly little county. Well, now an aviator and a photographer can go up and take views with the camera upside down, and in an hour or two the job's done. Get me? Well, that's the stunt Tom does on the Carolina coast, and a fellow named Turner, who is with him, does the camera work. They're bunking at Cape Peril till they finish around there and then they'll move on somewhere else. Father hooked that job for him and he thought it would tickle the old man to invite me down. He sent word for me to pick two good old scouts for company, so you two rummies are my pickings. See?"

"Pretty good pickings, too, eh, Legs?" observed Jimmy. "Sure your daddy's going to stop and bring us home in his yacht?"

"That's what he promised," said Legs. "He'll let us know by the wireless Cat says they've got at Cape Peril. This is the eighteenth, isn't it? He ought to be leaving Tampico right about this time, but he's going to stop by Cuba for a couple of days or so."

"Bet he's been having a swell time down

there," affirmed Cat. "You're the slowest rummy I ever saw. Why in the name o' Heck didn't you make him take you with him? Bet your life, I'd gone if my dad had a clipper."

"Nothing doing!" returned Legs. "It's something secret — about oil. He couldn't take any of the family — only his friends. Dad sure is good to his friends. He wants 'em to put a lot o' money in oil lands down there."

"Gee! I wish my daddy had a yacht," sighed Cat comically, "then I wouldn't have to go down on that blamed motorcycle with the coast guard. Wish Turner had brought the hydroplane up."

"Jiminy! have they got a hydro down there, too?" asked Jimmy excitedly.

"Sure they have. Didn't I tell you that? An airplane rigged up in a life preserver, that's what it looks like to me. They use it to survey the sounds and creeks around Cape Peril. Oh my, oh me, I see where I get a ride every day. You fellows, too, if you don't lose your nerve flying down to Seagulls' Nest."

"Bet your sweet life, here's one scout that won't," asserted Jimmy valiantly.

Legs, for the moment, was silent, thinking deeply.

"And fellows, you know they used to use seaplanes in the war to hunt for submarines," explained Cat.

"The mischief you say!" This from Jimmy.

"Sure! The subs, even when they were 'way down deep, made sort of rings on the top of the water, and the flyers could spy 'em out with the airplanes, and find out where to drop the depth bombs and blow the stuffings out of them."

"Golly!" exclaimed Jimmy.

"I bet you can't guess what they use them for now?" Cat persisted with his instruction of his friends.

"Search me!" returned Jimmy.

"Use 'em to look for shoals of fish that make pretty much the same sort of circles that submarines do. When the flyer sees 'em he signals to the fishermen where to net 'em. How's that?"

"Sounds fishy!" joked Jimmy.

"Oh, mush! Is that the best you can do?" came from the disgusted Cat. "I don't waste any more breath on mutts like you. You'd just as soon spring that rotten joke about the fish-

ermen and the salmon. They eat all they can, and what they can't, they can."

"Oh, no," denied Jimmy, "I canned that joke along with the other stale one about the lightship. Remember it? You tell a rube they raise all the vegetables they eat on that boat. Then the boob pops his eyes, and you explain they raise 'em from the row boat onto the deck."

"Bury all those chestnuts and bury 'em deep," directed Cat, with a pained expression. "But, say, that reminds me—"

"Just one more," interrupted Jimmy. "This is a bird for Legs. Say, Legs, know how long a fellow's legs ought to be? Don't know? Here's the answer. Just long enough to reach from his body to the ground. Hear that joke crack?"

Jimmy pounded Legs, delightedly.

"Put him out!" shouted Legs, at the same time giving his chum a shove that nearly landed him in the passageway. "You cribbed that joke from Adam. I heard that before you were born."

"Bury that, too," directed Cat, when Jimmy had righted himself and was trying, in revenge

for the upset, to flatten Legs's head against the window frame.

"And listen here," he added, as if seized by a sudden inspiration. "Did you boys know that Blackbeard used to scout around Cape Peril? Tell you what! Maybe we'll run across some buried treasure down there — doubloons and pieces-of-eight, shiver my timbers."

"Who in thunder is Blackbeard?" asked Jimmy, becoming interested at once.

"Gee! You never heard of Blackbeard? He was a fe-rocious pirate whose real name was Teach, from over in Accomac county on the Eastern Shore. He raised Cain with the merchant boats on the Virginia coast till the sea cops got on his tracks and he had to light out to Albemarle Sound. He operated down there for a while, till a ship from up this way jumped his boat and killed most of his men, and I bet you something pretty that those who got away hid their coin on the shore somewhere. Wouldn't it be funny if we ran across some of it?"

"You're right it would! Where did you see that, Cat, in the newspaper?" queried Jimmy.

"Golly Moses, Jimmy. You think you're

funny. You know that was about two hundred years ago."

"No, I didn't," asserted Jimmy. "I didn't know I was pulling a bone, swear I didn't."

Visions of adventures began to float through the lads' fancies.

"Oh, ye-ah, I remember!" exclaimed Legs with sudden enthusiasm. "Teach? By Jebo, he's the very fellow Stevenson — you know, the guy who wrote *Kidnapped* and *Treasure Island* — tells about in *The Master of* . . . Oh, shucks!"

"*Master of Oh Shucks!*" jeered Cat.

"*Of Ball — Ball — Ball,*" Legs stumbled, "Oh yes, I know, *The Master of Ballantre.* The guy supposed to be telling the yarn was captured by pirates who ran up the black flag and made the skipper and 'most all the crew of the captured ship walk the plank, all except two or three. Then Teach blacked up his face and curled his hair in rings and crammed his mouth full of glass and chewed it to make himself spit blood. Then he stuck his belt full of pistols and brandished a dirk and cussed a blue streak —pulled off a regular bughouse parade up and

down the deck, swearing he was Satan and that his ship was called 'Hades.' He wasn't any chocolate sundae pirate, he wasn't. He was a genu-wine blood-and-thunder guy, he was."

At this violent explosion from the mild-eyed, velvet-cheeked Legs, the other two scouts broke into a roar.

"Oh, Legs, naughty boy, ain't you ashamed of yourself?" mocked Jimmy.

"Got it all wrong, too," added Cat. "The saphead didn't see the note that said it wasn't the same Blackbeard who scouted in these parts. Why don't you take a squint down in the cellar when you are reading? Then you find what they say upstairs ain't so."

"Ah, get out! Hanged if I saw it," declared the muddled Legs. "Don't believe it was there, either. Anyhow, I don't see why they want to stick in junk like that to spoil a dandy good story."

"Hello, Central!" called Cat into his fist, raised to his mouth to represent a telephone. "Give me Legs's top story. How's the weather up there, Legs? Foggy as usual? I thought so."

"Don't cry, Legs," laughed Jimmy. "You'll

forget it before you're a hundred. See here, fellows, the pirate business is sort of on the blink now, but I certainly would like to spend about two years sailing around the world. That's a long sight better education than what you get in books. But blessed if I want to swab decks. You can't look at the scenery and study the customs of the natives while you are splicing ropes and splashing water around all day. Wonder if they'd take me on one of these pleasure yachts as an entertainer. I can play the guitar and do card tricks —"

"That's right, Jimmy," interrupted Legs, now recovering his usual good humor, " blow off to hear yourself talk. But tell you what's a fact. If you can speak 'steen languages, you can get a fat job on 'most any old ship. Easy berth, too. Father picked up a fellow in Newport News who can tie Spanish up in a bow knot, believe me, and, as Father can't talk anything much but American, he is giving him all sorts of money just to help him chin the Greasers down there in Mexico."

" That straight? " said Jimmy. " Gee! I sure will take that Spanish course in High

School next session, and when I get up on it, I'll run down and open an airplane factory in Brazil."

"Come off, they don't speak Spanish in Brazil, nut," corrected Legs. "They talk Portuguese."

"All right, then. Can't phaze me. I'll go on to Bonus Airs."

"Huh! Reckon you do need some Spanish! Bonus Airs!" sneered Legs.

"What is it if that ain't right?" insisted Jimmy.

Legs scratched his head, but apparently without extracting any information therefrom.

"Tell you the truth, I've forgotten, but I'm dead certain you're a million miles off. I know that much."

"Huh-huh-huh-huh!" grunted Jimmy. "Better find out something yourself before you try to give me lessons."

"I know what it is," announced Cat, who had just been in consultation with a gentleman in the seat in front; "it's Bwanus I-res, and it's the capital of Argentine Republic."

"You fudged, Cat," detected Jimmy, almost

sticking his accusing finger in Cat's eye. "I saw you get the dope. Can't put that over on us."

The informer smiled over his newspaper, while Cat twisted his mouth ludicrously. "Anyway, I did it," he protested.

"Give you a dime to do it again," Jimmy baited him.

"Don't you know Shakespeare never repeats," said Cat, with sham solemnity.

"But Shakespeare's cat does," retorted Jimmy. "Cat, you are some fraud. Know where you are going?"

"Anyway, I've got a return ticket. Say, boys," he suddenly shouted, "we're there!"

Instantly six eager eyes, which had been giving but fleeting attention to the familiar sand dunes along the seashore, were focused on two landmarks just ahead, indicating the end of the first leg of their journey. One was the century-and-a-half-old stone lighthouse, now in disuse; the other, its modern successor whose revolving light at night guides a host of seacraft through the great strait between Cape Charles and Cape Henry.

"Knapsacks up," yelled Jimmy. "Hurrah, all off for the Cape!"

In wild excitement, each lad grabbed up the slim roll of luggage lying at his feet, made for the door and bounded out upon the sand. To the right was the vast blue Atlantic; and to the left, over the sand hills, the shores of the Bay of Lynnhaven, ancient site of the Indian village of the Chesapeakes, where, in the year 1607, the doughty adventurers from the good ships *Susan Constant, Goodhope,* and *Discovery,* made their first landing before sailing on to what was to be the first permanent settlement of the English in the New World, the famous foundation on the island of Jamestown.

CHAPTER II

JUMPING OFF AT CAPE HENRY

"Well, fellows, here I am!"

It was a hearty, ringing voice that struck the boys' ears as its owner, whose every movement proclaimed the perfect coördination of the muscles beneath his aviator costume, strode along the station platform to greet his young visitors. A firm-set chin, brown eyes with wrinkles of perpetual good humor about them, a high forehead, a wholesome, tanned skin, a boyish shock of brown hair with a pronounced cowlick — this was Tom Hardy's outer man. At first sight, Legs and Jimmy lost all awe of him.

As Cat rushed up, the airman seized the boy's hand in such a viselike grasp that the victim squirmed, "ouched," and yelled for mercy.

"Why not introduce me to your chums, Mutt and Jeff?" demanded the host.

"Doggone it, how can I when you're mashing every bone in my flipper?" cried Cat, still writhing. "Lemme go, will you?"

"Just showing you how glad I am to see you. There now."

Tom Hardy beamed on the three boys.

Cat, released but still nursing his crumpled hand, proclaimed in the tone of a circus barker, as he nodded at his lanky companion, "This sawed-off fellow here is William Madison Moseley Hatton, known for short as Legs."

"With that name, no wonder he's stunted," laughed Hardy, at the same time giving Legs a hearty clap on the shoulder, instead of the dreaded handshake.

"And this," proceeded Cat, indicating Jimmy, "the tallest specimen of scout out of captivity, is named Jimmy Todd. If he ever sported a middle name he's lost it, and he's shed every nickname we fellows ever gave him. First, we called him 'Tadpole'; then, when he shot up 'bout two inches, we dubbed him 'Dusty,' 'cause the seat of his pants is so near the ground that they're always covered with dust; then, when he tumbled for one of the calicks in High, we nicked him 'Spooney'; and when he got to handing out that limerick stuff, we gave him 'Ricks,' but somehow, we always get back to

Jimmy. I reckon it just naturally fits in better with Todd."

Hardy was already shaking Jimmy's right hand while the lad used his left to ball a fist at the barking Cat.

"That'll do for today, Miller," said Hardy, as he released Jimmy's hand. "Don't use up all your words. May need a few when you grow up and get in the lawyer game. Jimmy and Legs, then, are these fellows' names to me and I'm plain Hardy. See? Don't want anyone to be mistering anybody. Not even the cook does it at Seagulls' Nest. Now, let's beat it."

He directed his guests toward the resting place of his famous flyer *Windjammer,* on a level, firm plot of ground well back from the lighthouses and the sand hills.

"Gee, boys, you don't know how glad I am to have you," he said as they trotted along. "Nothin' like fifteeners for pep, and we'll all pep together. I've got a sort of holiday at present. Turner's busy on some maps and photos, so our operations are held up for a spell. I've just got a job as lighthouse inspector on the coast, but don't count on their calling on

me just yet, or my calling on them, rather. By the way, which of you kids is a shark on mathematics?"

"I pass," Cat hastened to proclaim — an announcement that he had occasion to regret later. "I flunked on that *Pons Asinorum,* and I've never understood a thing about Geometry since. You flunked, too, Jimmy. Old Whiskers got red in the face trying to rub it into our heads, didn't he?"

Whiskers, so called because of his sideburns, was the lads' teacher in High School, and the pupils had facetiously dubbed the rawboned nag on which he solemnly took his exercise after school hours, "Hypotenuse."

"I swear I b'lieve Hypo knows a lot more math. than I do," conceded Jimmy, "just from old Whiskers bouncing up and down on him."

This drew a laugh from all the boys, in which Hardy joined after being informed of the nature and constitution of Hypotenuse.

"Here's your shark," continued Jimmy, pulling Legs forward. "He's wading into Trig. and eating it up. All his sense is not in his feet, though you might think so."

"Just wanted to know," declared Hardy, when Legs protested against Jimmy's estimate of his knowledge. "Now I want to know, too, who goes up with me and who's going to make the coast guard happy. You're the unselfish kid, Cat. You want to take the motor?"

"Sure I do," agreed Cat grinning, and at the same time kicking Jimmy's shins when that young man seemed on the point of opening his mouth to contradict him. "I don't need any air-rides to-day. I'm fresh from one."

And he proceeded to repeat what he had told his friends on the electric train.

"Well, I'll be hanged if you ain't your father's own son," was Hardy's comment when the boy had finished his story. "We'll have to give you a brass medal to chime in with your actions. Have to get up early in the morning to beat you to it, boy."

At the compliment, Cat's chest swelled pompously and his eyes danced gleefully.

"Now, you two," observed Hardy a little later, addressing Legs and Jimmy. "You two who are going up will have to sit in one another's laps. I mean," he laughed, "one will have to

sit in the other's lap—that's the only way to stow you in. I think, judging by appearances, Jimmy better be the top layer."

"I never thought of that beanpole having a lap," declared Jimmy. "Get me a microscope, Cat."

Hardy put an end to the disturbance that threatened, and continued, "Now, see here, you two fellows who haven't been initiated, like your friend Cat, may feel a little wriggly for a minute or two, but you'll soon get over it. Keep this in mind: Flying is regular life insurance compared to dodging autos in any big city, and remember it's how a fellow shows up in a new experience that proves what sort of stuff he's got in him. Listen to what Service says. You know Service, the war poet?

> 'When your legs seem made o' jelly
> And you're squeamish in your belly,
> And you want to turn about and do a bunk,
> For Tom's sake, kid, don't show it,—
> Don't let your mateys know it,
> You're just sufferin' from funk, funk, funk.'

Get that? I put the Tom in to suit this present

occasion and audience. Grab hold o' that sentiment and swallow it. Hear?"

"Didn't need that to give me backbone," affirmed Jimmy.

"Reckon I can go anywhere Jimmy can," was Legs's conclusion in a feebler tone.

When the group reached the famous *Windjammer* the lads raised a wild whoop and set to examining her in every detail while her owner held forth on her various excellencies.

"Now," said he as he finished his lecture, "time to be off. Here, put those on," he directed his passengers, fishing out goggles and headgear. "You, Cat, will meet the coast guard in front of the lighthouse about fifteen minutes from now. Don't let the motorcycle jar all the pep out of you. Want some left for the jamboree to-night, hear?"

"Oh, gee!" exclaimed Cat. "What's doing?"

"Oh, just a little roughhouse, with extra choice eats stored in my bird's gizzard there. Smell a rat, do you, Cat?" added Hardy, giving the boy a swift kick as he attempted to peep into the cockpit. "Take your nose out of there.

Off with you. And now, Legs, old boy, your time's come. Get in the electric chair and be strapped. Don't look so green about the gills. You'll live to tell the tale. Remember Service. Crawl in!"

Legs cast his eyes into the well, and, apparently satisfied that it had a solid bottom, straddled in and took his seat.

"Keep your fingers crossed," laughed Hardy. "Knock on wood, and keep your eyes open for black cats, and nothing will happen to you. Come along, Jimmy."

He grabbed him by the seat of his breeches and speeded him in, while Cat was directed to help with the straps, a duty undertaken with such enthusiasm as to draw various gasps and punches from his victims.

Hardy meanwhile gave *Windjammer's* motor a final inspection, singing softly to himself,

"I'll make you rumble,
Across the sky,
And if I don't tumble,
I'll live till I die."

Then, assured that his passengers were safely stowed and leathered, he fixed himself in the

pilot's seat and directed Cat and another bystander to start his propeller and give his bird a shove. In a few moments, the crew had left the cheering Cat below and were soaring up the heavens.

Every drop of blood in their bodies seemed to be tingling to the tips of their ears when the taxying came to an end and the new flyers felt the machine rising. Legs wrapped his arms around Jimmy's chest in the convulsive hug of a drowning man, while the latter clutched the edge of the well, an interminable "Gee-e-e-e!" flowing from his lips.

"Say, Legs, the ground's sinking!" he faltered out after some moments.

There was a tense silence on the part of the boy beneath him.

"I b'lieve you're scared," persisted Jimmy with a quiver in his tone. "Great Caesar's ghost! Stop squeezing the life out of me."

Continued silence on the part of the under lad.

"Dizzy?" persisted the tormentor.

"Naw!" finally returned Legs, with affected composure.

"Me neither. Duck your head, Legs. Going

to butt into the moon in a minute. Want me to cut off a piece of green cheese for you? ''

"Quit talking and let me look," countered the unhappy Legs.

"Doesn't that motor jar! Just like one of those vibrators you put to the back of your neck." Jimmy babbled on, principally to keep up his own nerve. "Ain't this a grand and glorious feeling! Say, Legs, don't the ocean look funny through these goggles? ''

"I'm looking! '' quavered Legs.

Another silence as the bird rose to the desired altitude and the pilot, by a swift shift of his levers, sent her shooting on a bee line.

"All O. K.? '' he shouted. "Not scared, are you? Sit tight, boys, and don't rock the boat."

"We're all right," called back Jimmy as spokesman for both, and then to Legs, as he became composed enough to remark some physical discomfort. "Golly, Legs, I swear I b'lieve you sharpened up your knees before we got in; they're jabbing right into my meat like a couple of knife blades. And stop blowing a gale on the back of my neck. You're scared. I can feel the way you're panting."

"I'm not, either. I'm having a swell time. Let me look, will you?"

The fact is, as the flyer sped on her way without accident, the lads began to forget any sense of uneasiness and to give their minds wholly to the marvelous panorama of sea and sand below and boundless sky above.

"Say, Legs," jested Jimmy, "I can see the rock of Gibraltar plain as day."

"Your eyes are rum," countered Legs. "I can spy the Pyramids of Egypt."

"High spy!" shot back Jimmy.

"Oh, slush!"

"Say, Legs, wouldn't our mothers be all up in the air if they knew we were up here now. Gee whillikins! Look at that toy steamship way down yonder. Looks to me like a terrapin crawling along smoking a cigarette. What does it look like to you."

"Like a steamer."

"Ah, come off, you haven't got any more imagination than a sand-fiddler."

"I'm mighty thankful I haven't. You need to put a mustard plaster on yours. When I see a rattlesnake, I don't want to take it for a

humming bird. Now dry up and let me look and enjoy myself. You are worse than the simp that talks all through the movies and won't let you get your mind on 'em. I'm not going to answer another blamed thing."

In awed silence, the two lads, now forgetting themselves in the wonder of the experience, stared over at the great expanse of blue sea on their left—a sea of glass it appeared, with tiny spots that were vessels. On the horizon, the cloudless sky merged almost imperceptibly into the waters below.

To the right, the sand hills were fringed by splotches of dwarfed forests, and beyond these lay a variegated pattern of level inland, with its marshy inlets and gleaming ponds.

For a half hour the bird sped onward, and then suddenly the pilot cried, "Nearly there! See, there's Cape Peril and the lighthouse ahead!"

The lads, thrilled to the soul, strained their eyes through the goggles. They saw a great bulge of seashore rather than a cape and near the middle of this arc, a toylike lighthouse. It seemed but a moment more before the machine

began circling and the shore apparently flew up to meet them.

The bird made an egg-shell landing on the firm level ground covered with a layer of wind-blown sand, well back from the seashore and the dunes.

Hardy vaulted out and inspected his passengers.

"Well, boys, still alive and kicking? 'Fraid I'd find two corpses lashed to the mast like the skipper in the *Wreck of the Hesperus.*"

The lads were more like two spirited colts straining on their leashes. Any pallor that might have blanched their faces at the beginning of the ascent had given place to a vivid flush from the stinging wind and the excitement. Their eyes sparkled with the zest of a new and thrilling experience. Every exclamation and superlative in their vocabulary tumbled out in their effort to express their feelings.

"Say, how about letting us loose?" finally asked Jimmy. "I'm tired of being hitched up to this flamingo."

"Don't want to stay like the Siamese twins they used to exhibit in the side show, eh?"

laughed Hardy as he helped them unbuckle the leathers.

"Not with this thing. I'd look like a wart on a fishing pole."

"Sure don't want any warts like you on me," growled Legs, climbing out after his short-legged companion.

"Haven't got any flesh wounds from Jimmy's elbows, have you?" jested Hardy.

"Flesh wounds!" sneered Jimmy. "He hasn't meat enough to make a flesh wound!"

Hardy nipped off any disturbance that might have followed by directing the pair to help him shove his plane into a roughly constructed hangar some fifty yards away. This duty performed, the newcomers had a chance to take a closer look at the scene around them.

The horizon, in the background, was fringed with stunted pine woods rising beyond a broad sterile, sandy plain. In the foreground, the gleaming blue of the ocean showed here and there between sand hills sparsely grown with long, waving yellow sand grass. Back of the hangar and extending for about a mile parallel with the beach, was a sort of lagoon, perhaps a

quarter of a mile in width at its broadest point. From the surface of the lake at its nearer end rose a strange looking wooden structure that Hardy explained to be the hangar of the sea-plane. A short distance from the farther end of this unruffled body of water stood, on what seemed a vast mound in comparison with the sandy stretches about it, the gaunt and grim lighthouse of Cape Peril.

"And here's Seagulls' Nest," announced the host, as he led his guests seaward and pointed to a spacious cottage, half weatherboarded and half shingled, rising from an elevated plot some two hundred yards in front of them.

CHAPTER III

THE JAMBOREE

Seagulls' Nest was the property of a group of city business men who used it as headquarters for the fall duck hunting and fishing season. Hence, it was readily leased by Hardy for the summer. Leaving out the kitchen ell, the lower floor formed dining-room, lounge, and library in one. Above stairs, one room was appropriated by Turner for developing his pictures and for his drawing work; another was Hardy's workshop; the other three were available for sleeping quarters.

The whole establishment was furnished in the most rough-and-ready camping style. A long table of unfinished wood, nine or ten substantial chairs, a desk, a hanging set of bookshelves, and an improvised cupboard constituted the fittings of the living room. Its walls were adorned with horse, dog, and fish pictures along with a varied assortment of trophies of the chase. In the bedrooms above, were cots and little more. All

bathing facilities were abundantly supplied by the ocean.

"Hello, Mother Hubbard!" called out Hardy as the trio mounted the steps to the porch extending the length of the building's front. "Boys, there's my mascot, the only lady on deck, and I'd take my oath she's a witch."

He pointed to a one-eyed coal-black cat sitting near the door and blinking her remaining optic in a way that showed but languid interest in the visitors.

"And now, fellows," he added, as they entered the door, "here's our joint abode, so to speak. Make yourselves 'to hum,' as they say down East. You can bounce on the French furniture, shine up your knives on the damask tablecloth; prop your feet on the Italian mantelpiece, and do anything except monkey with Turner's junk upstairs. If you do that, you might as well get measured by the undertaker."

In a moment, Luke, the cook, a powerful, good-natured looking mulatto, came in to greet the newcomers. He was plainly delighted at the arrival of company to liven up the loneliness. After his enthusiastic welcome, he was directed

by Hardy to fetch the eatables from the airplane and prepare his very best dinner with all possible speed.

Then appeared Turner, a tall, sandy-haired fellow of about twenty-five years, with a gaunt, solemn-looking face; "slow but sure" written in every line of his features.

"Hello, Turner!" cried out Hardy. "Here are two of our Seaboard Airline patrol, Legs Hatton and Jimmy Todd. Our old friend Miller will blow in on the motorcycle about two hours from now. Fellows, this is Sockless Turner, a Tarheel from

> 'Way down on the Pasquotank
> Where the bullfrogs jump from bank to bank.'"

"And proud of it," asserted Turner as he gave the boys his most cordial pumphandle shake.

"Now, Turner, while we are waiting for Cat and dinner, take the fellows up and show 'em your movie apparatus and make 'em forget their stomachs. Cat's heard all that dope already."

Up the stairs went the three, the boys taking, en route, an inquisitive glance into their new dormitory. They followed the deliberate Turner

into his workshop, littered with charts, maps, drawing material, aerial photo equipment, and many curious-looking objects, which the instructor began to explain in his drawling tone, warming up more and more as he proceeded with his subject.

Having been initiated into the mysteries of aerial photography, the lads were next enlightened concerning the magic of the movies — how to make an auto run backwards, how to create ghosts, how to make the same person appear in different costumes on the same film, how a man is made to seem to jump up a wall of twenty feet, how the dummy is substituted for the flesh-and-blood person in movie accidents such as falls from a fifteenth story, how scenery is worked in to give all the illusion of nature, and many other curious and entertaining facts, the recital of which held the two lads open mouthed and spellbound.

"Gosh! this fellow knows everything," was the thought both began to entertain.

And to confirm their opinion of his boundless knowledge, he wound up with a lesson in topography which entertained Legs immensely, but

threw Jimmy into an embarrassed state of perplexity, till he was glad to be relieved by a wild whoop from the seashore announcing the arrival of Cat.

As the other two scouts bounded down the stairs, followed by Turner and joined by Hardy, the newcomer burst into the premises sounding like a whole menagerie of wild animals. The place was not new to him, so he took no time in inspection.

"Great Gee! I'm sore," he exclaimed, rubbing his person vigorously and giving a twist to his spacious mouth. "I sure ought to get a scout badge for—what do you call it—stick-to-it-iveness, darn if I oughtn't. That ride shook the wits out of me. Never again!" he added, holding up his hand with mock solemnity, and then changing his key, "Well, I swear, if here ain't Legs and Jimmy alive and kicking. How was it, fellows?"

And on the instant he insisted on having every detail of the air trip, interspersed with numerous comic and sarcastic comments by himself.

"Well, old scouts," he finally conceded, "I'll shake hands with the Seaboard Airline patrol.

We have all three been up, which is an extra cinch on the aviation badge; we've all made models; we've got a good line on famous aviators and airships; and, as soon as Hardy gives us a little more dope on motors and ornithopters and those other opters, we'll be able to give points to the man who makes 'em, we will. And I can see that new badge right 'longside the other flock on my sleeve this minute."

Cat surveyed his comrades smilingly.

Hardy and Turner watched the lads' enthusiasm with happy smiles until what Hardy called the dinner "de Luke's" was announced. They all fell to with voracious appetites, even Cat finding himself able to sit down to it, despite his repeated conflicts with the motorcycle.

After the meal, a dip in the surf was voted by the boys as next in order, but the cautious Hardy directed that, although they might get into their trunks forthwith, on no condition were they to enter the water until their dinner was well on its way to digestion, and, besides, they were not to go in until he got there to superintend the job. These directions being acceded to, the lads shuffled off their scout outfits, slipped on

their trunks, and made for the beach to kill the required interval.

"Look here, fellows, let's have a little field day while we're waiting to go in," suggested Cat. "Give us a back, Legs. Come on, Jimmy, frog it over the skyscraper."

Legs, with apparent docility, bent his back to accommodate the agile Jimmy; but when Cat attempted to keep the pot boiling, the bent back humped itself abruptly and shot the prospective leaper into a heap on the sand. The discomforted Cat bounded up, harnessed his finger into Legs's trunks and threatened to tear off that flimsy garment while he mauled the offender's head, until Jimmy interfered and diverted their minds to a broad jump.

He lined off taw on the moist sand, leaped a scant six feet as estimated by Cat's eye; then the measurer followed and heeled in at six and a half.

"Now, kangarooster, your turn," said Cat to Legs; "take your fling. You've got it sewed up already."

Legs bounded at least nine feet, landing on the seat of his trunks.

"What shall we do with Wooloomooloo?" asked the grinning Cat.

"Who?" demanded Jimmy.

"Didn't hear about him? He's the new immigrant kangaroo who came in with a Noah's Ark load of four thousand animals for the New York Zoo. He can hop fifty-two feet — pretty near as good as a trained flea. Legs is his first cousin."

"Tell you how to fix Legs," suggested Jimmy. "Load him up to the nozzle with buckshot, and then we could make him trail us the way the guy did in the *Jumping Frog* Mark Twain wrote about. Gee whizz! Never heard of that? You've got something to live for! When I read that tale, I came near splitting my four sides and rolling right off the chair. Here's the way it goes: The yap in the story had the jumpingest frog anywhere in the whole country, and he cleaned up a barrel of money betting on him till a funny geezer came along and allowed he could lick the prize croaker with any old frog the yap picked up for him. So, while the owner was off hunting another frog in the swamp, the slick guy grabbed up the performing frog and

loaded him to the gills with buckshot. Well, 'fore long, here comes the fellow with the new frog, and when the stranger takes it and sets it side by side with the yap's and they give 'em both a shove, blamed if the new frog didn't jump about ten feet and the old prize one couldn't do a darned thing but just flop up and down like a limp jumping-jack."

"That's pretty rich," approved Cat, with a moderate grin. "Though it doesn't make me split my sides, but I guess that's because you're telling it."

Legs, standing off at some distance on the spot where he had landed, showed no signs of amusement.

"Laugh at the man's joke, Legs," exhorted Cat.

The rest of the wait was spent in a game of kitten ball, the details of which abbreviated form of baseball Cat had recently acquired, and much sport resulted from an effort to make three individuals do the work for a whole team.

Hardy finally appeared attired for his plunge and suggested going down to the culvert, for diving. This construction admitted the salt

water of the ocean to Lake Herring to prevent the latter from becoming pestilential or furnishing a breeding place for mosquitoes. The ocean mouth of this spillway was formed of piles driven deep into the sea-bed and projecting some distance from the shore line. From the end of it, excellent diving into sufficiently deep water was offered.

With a whoop that started the echoes in the woods beyond the sandhills, the boys made a wild rush for the diving place. Fast and furious was the fun of the swimmers as they plunged one after the other into the briny waters, speeding up the ladder and repeating the performance to "keep the pot boiling." Once Cat followed too close on the gawky Legs, tripped him, and sent him sprawling into the water.

"Gee! that was a buster!" he shouted. "Don't be too rough on the poor ocean, Legs. You might bruise it. You must have taken swimming lessons in the correspondence school and lost most of 'em in the mail," yelled the persecutor as his victim came up sputtering and vowing direst vengeance. As Cat plunged in, a stingaree wrapped itself about his ankles and

sent him yelping back up the ladder and Legs was more than avenged.

Hardy kept a close eye on the swimmers, taking an occasional header himself, until they all had their fill of fun and salt water and wended their way back to Seagulls' Nest.

Seven o'clock, the time set for Hardy's promised jamboree, finally arrived. A royal feast was the preliminary—spots and hogfish, ham and celery, vegetables to match, and the most savory plum pudding that a boy ever ate. Even after all this, the chinks had to be filled up with nuts and candy.

Stuffed but happy, the party started the roughhouse. There was a jew's-harp performance by Turner, and a guitar offering by Hardy, with a breakdown chorus. Then, as soon as digestion permitted, Legs and Jimmy staged a boxing bout that threw the spectators into a roar. A mock jujutsu exhibition by Cat, with Legs as the victim, was next on the program, which ended with a minstrel show in which the whole establishment participated. Of this last, Luke was easily the star.

Finally, as the evening wore on to the end,

Hardy moved that the show be concluded by drinking the health of *Windjammer,* more notable in its flights than any roc in the Arabian Nights, and by all singing a composition of his own, carbon copies of which were distributed.

"Which ale shall we drink it in," shouted Hardy, "Adam's or ginger?"

"Ginger!" roared the lads with one accord.

The suggestion being thus noisily approved, the ginger-ale was produced and drained off with great gusto. Then Hardy, after a few introductory chords on his guitar, started to bellow out his verse to a rollicking tune, while he flourished one hand in the most approved orchestra-leader fashion:

"A jolly rover of the air,
A seasoned bird am I.
There's not a venture I'd not dare,
When sweeping through the sky.
I feel my blood
Surge to the flood,
As I mount up the sky.

"Now, boys," he paused to exhort, "all join in and put plenty of punch in your singing. Now:

"Up, up she wings; the motor sings;
I guide her at my pleasure.
High o'er the world Windjammer swings
To paths no soul can measure.
The sphere below
Shrinks as we go
To heights no gauge can measure.

"Next spasm," shouted the leader. "Rip it out!

"I maul the moon around the rink;
The stars I bowl and batter;
I put the sunball on the blink;
The sheeplike clouds I scatter.
It's bully fun
To see them run—
The curling clouds I shatter.

"I crumple up the hurricanes;
I flip the ticklish breezes;
I smash the hail to window-panes,
And roll the snow in cheeses.
I churn the air
Until the Bear
High in the heavens sneezes.

"Either Bear you choose, boys. Ursa Major or Ursa Minor. We'll go out and take a look at them presently. Now, all together!"

Down came every fist on the table till the glasses bounced and rattled an accompaniment to the last stanza:

"Whir-whir-whir-whir-whir-whir;
Throb, throb, throbby, throbbity;
And purr, purr, purr-purr, purr, purr;
Bob, bob, bobby, bobbity;
Buzz, buzz, buzz;
Suzz, suzz, suzz;
Chob, chob, chobby, chobbity.
Wow!"

This rigmarole was rendered time and again, each time with more tremendous clatter than the time before. But even boy energy ebbs at last, and the tumult began to die away.

'It's all slightly exaggerated," said Hardy, "as Mark Twain declared when told of a report of his own death, but it expresses my feelings, and, I believe, the feelings of every flyer that ever trimmed a bird."

"You bet it does," agreed the chorus.

Then the conviviality moderated into a short discussion of the joys of flying.

During all this jollity several hours had hurried by, and when the cuckoo clock announced

eleven, and Hardy expressed the conviction that it was time for hard-working lads to be abed, it was with the greatest difficulty that they managed to make a start. Finally, they got to the point of making a rush for their sleeping quarters, but, even then, the easy process of undressing was interrupted by frequent tussles and pillow fights before reaching the pajama stage.

"I am growing old, Mother," remarked Cat whimsically, donning the above-mentioned garment; "my pink pajamas are turning white. Tough the grudge all these laundries have against sporting colors."

Jimmy, meanwhile, was carefully slicking back his hair before retiring—a habit that he always indulged in, with the explanation that he didn't know whom he might meet in his sleep.

"Hullygully, ain't he cutie!" jeered Cat.

A few moments later, all three were stretched out on their cots, and, after a little more jabbering, silence fell.

"What are the wild waves saying, Legs?" abruptly broke forth Jimmy, who had been listening to the gentle wash of the surf on the shore.

"Saying, close your face and let me sleep," growled Legs, just feeling his first delicious drowsiness.

"Got me that time, didn't you?" Jimmy returned, and then he slowly composed:

"There is a young fellow named Legs
Who . . . trots on a pair of slim pegs;
He can . . . wiggle each ear . . .
In a way . . . that I fear . . .
He's kin to — a — a — a — "

But while drowsily trying to search out a suitable rhyme, he, too, fell asleep.

CHAPTER IV

CAPE PERIL'S JOLLY HERMIT

When the boys woke up the next morning, or rather when they were tumbled out of bed about eight by Hardy and Turner, who had already been up an hour and had developed a voracious appetite for the breakfast waiting in the kitchen, the sea proved a bitter disappointment. As the three guests bounded to a front window to inspect the prospects, it was disgustingly placid without a sign of a whitecap. The gentle waves that washed the beach seemed fearful of displacing a single pebble.

"B'lieve that old ocean is just trying to spite us," concluded Cat. "'Fraid we won't get a good man-sized wave to ride while we're down here."

"Hurry up," shouted Hardy as he left the room. "If you kids don't get down to breakfast in less than a pig's whisper, I'll be riding *you* good and heavy."

A savory odor of frying fish that penetrated

the room from the region below proved even more stimulating than Hardy's threat, and after dashing out for a morning dip of brief duration, the lads scrambled into their scout togs and a few moments later presented three smiling faces and ravenous appetites at the breakfast table.

"Want to go over to Cape Peril, don't you?" asked the host when all were through.

An eager "You bet!" was the unanimous answer.

"Well, you've got a regular picnic before you," declared Hardy.

"Old Buffum's the rarest bird you ever imagined. Been running the light over there for the last ten years, ever since he left the Merchant Marine service. What he doesn't know about ships and sea lore isn't worth knowing. He's got the dots on every vessel that plies up and down this coast and knows where they are every minute of the day or night. Has a chart tacked up on the wall and a lot of pins with the name of a ship tied to each one, and he shifts them all the time he's got an eye open, to indicate the boats' positions at any specified mo-

ment. Doesn't get far off either, unless something very unforeseen happens. If you want to complete your education in the water line, ask Bill Buffum. And he's the queerest old duck. Sits there all by himself most of the time, reading sea yarns or watching the ocean. But he has right much company. Everybody who comes this way stops to see him, sometimes as many as three visitors a week, not counting the man who brings his ' vittles ' from the fishing settlement over yonder. So far as I know he does his own washing, for I never saw him without that same blue shirt that always looks tolerable clean. Reckon it must be an easy conscience. Now let's go over and chat with him."

There was a noisy chorus of assent.

The lads were ready enough for the experience. Cape Peril had a tang of romance to its very name and to meet an ex-mariner who had scoured the Seven Seas was a treat not to be had every day. " He doesn't mind boys asking him questions, does he? " inquired Legs.

" Tickles him to death. Only trouble is to stop him when he gets wound up. I'll leave you fellows with him for a while, and when I come

back and sit a little, I'll hop up and give the signal to go."

Merrily joking and laughing, the four trudged along the sea beach, over the culvert that spanned the depression between the region of Seagulls' Nest and the domain of Cape Peril, and up the mound to the lighthouse. The lads viewed the weatherbeaten exterior with intense interest as Hardy recounted the services it rendered to vessels seeking to shun the dangerous shoals it faced.

Then the four passed through the open door into a bare circular basement. Here Hardy shouted for the keeper.

"I seen you ahoy," called back a hearty voice. "Climb the companionway up amidships. The skipper is within."

Up the ladderlike stair climbed the procession, emerging into a second circular room, evidently the living quarters of the keeper. A couch covered with a rusty crazy quilt, a cupboard, a great stove, a table littered with a rare collection of odds and ends, various chairs and boxes of all sizes, shelves supporting everything imaginable from a mousetrap to a cannonball, maps,

charts, and curios from every quarter of the world adorning the curving walls of the room — such were the furnishings of this strange abode of the veteran of the sea.

The "Cap'n," a short, broad man of some sixty years, with a bushy white beard, twinkling bright eyes on either side of a mighty nose, came forward on his bowed legs to welcome his visitors.

"So these is them," said he as Hardy presented the boys before taking his leave. "Glad to see ye, lads," he added, picking up the pipe he had laid aside in order to shake their hands. "If you can't find chairs to accommodate ye, the boxes is soft and springy. Buffum's my name, and Buffum's my nature. You don't find no style hyuh, but what I has you're welcome to it. I know that suits ye, boys. You look like you've got horse sense, and horse sense is what old Bill Buffum swears by. And ye've got good clean smooth faces I see, lads. Keep 'em smooth and clean, and when your thoughts begin to write wrinkles on 'em, let 'em be jolly, happy wrinkles, for your thoughts write on your face so everybody kin read 'em. You can't fool old

Mother Nature, lads, and don't try. Horse sense and happiness, lads, them's the words."

He seated himself under six eager eyes, and began to puff vigorously on his pipe.

"Tell me you used to be a sailor," began Legs.

Captain Buffum refilled and relighted his pipe, and putting on his most knowing look, proceeded: "They told you right, lad, they told you right. A sailor I was and, though my old body is tied down in this hyuh lighthouse, my mind is a-sailing the sea right this minute. I was born at sea, and I reckon that first salt spray I took in when I opens my mouth to tell 'em I'd come must 'a give me a taste I couldn't never git over. Then I growed up in a seaport as nigh to the water as where I'm sittin' here. I growed up with the salt air in my lungs, lads."

Captain Buffum nodded his head in the direction of the ocean. "When I fust seed the vessels in the harbor," he continued, "the sea drawed me, and she kept a drawin' me till I was eighteen year old, and then I says to my father, 'I'm a-goin' to sea.' And he says to me, 'Bill, you're a danged fool!' And says I, 'I knows

it, but a fool is goin' to sea.' And I went, boys; I went. The sea had drawed me, same as the magnet does the needle, ever sence I fust seen it, and, when you fall in love with the sea, she's the goldarnest drawin'est sweetheart a felluh can have. She don't let go fer nuthin', and sometimes she takes such a almighty likin' to you she opens up them foamy jaws o' hers and swallows you whole, and keeps you tight till kingdom come in her Davy Jones's locker."

"Where's that?" inquired Legs wonderingly.

"That's a name for the bottom of the sea," explained Cap'n Buffum, with a laugh, and added with a solemn face, "where many a good sailor lies a-moulderin' and many a good ship, too. In the old days, that was the place where I wanted to go when my time came, though I warn't in no blasted hurry, just like you lads ain't. But I thought the wust thing that could happen to a sailorman was to flicker out on dry land, and though I had to use my fists in more'n one skirmish on shore, lads, I kept my weather eye open for to keep a whole skin for Davy Jones's locker when that thar sea-witch took a notion to

blow her whistle fer me. Thar were one time, though, lads, when I had that eye shet, and that was when I fit a dooel."

"Gee! have you fought a duel?" exclaimed Jimmy, popping his black eyes in wonder and admiration, while the other two boys leaned forward in rapt attention. "I thought everybody who did that was dead long ago."

"When I say fit a dooel," pursued Cap'n Buffum, blowing out a cloud of smoke, "I ain't walkin' the chalk line o' truth. I was all primed to fight one day when I was circumwented, lads. I was circumwented. This was the way of it: There was a sailor on *The Flying Jenny* (she flied on the ocean, lads) 'bout ten years younger than me and the viles', out-cussinest, out-lyines' bluejacket that ever clum a riggin'. One day he said sumpin' about a gal I wouldn't stand for fer nuthin,' and I give it back to him hot and heavy, hot and heavy, I did. 'Well, all right,' says he with a string o' oaths that ought to 'a burned a hole plumb through his throat, 'that means a round next time we has shore leave.' 'That's me,' says I, 'fists or pistols?' 'Pistols is a gentleman's weapon,' says he.

'Though I don't see whar you got no such title, pistols let it be,' says I.

"I hadn't never heard tell of seconds in them days, so, next shore leave we has, we goes together to a pawnshop and buys a gun apiece, lads, and then we makes for a ole field, nice and quiet, outside the town. 'Now,' says he, 'le's turn back to back and step off fifty paces.' 'I ain't got no eyes in the back of my head,' says I. 'And you don't need none,' says he, mild as a spring mornin'. Then, blister my boots, lads, when I faces round from east to west, that scoundrel he boxed the compass in his tracks and comes back to whar he starts from and he ups and whacks me a murderous thump on the skull with the butt of his pistol, and I falls like a log on the ground, jus' like a log."

The Cap'n paused at this dramatic point to take another draw on his pipe.

The excited Jimmy hastened to ask, "How did you know he hit you with a pistol if you didn't see him?"

"How would you know, my mate, ef lightning was to strike you? I laid thar fer two hours limp an' pacified, and when I comes to and pulls

my senses together and feels the back o' my head, thar was the criss-cross ridges made by that 'ere pistol butt, and I knowed right off what that devil had done. I hed blood in my eye, lads, and ef I'd 'a ketched that scoundrel then, I'm a-feared thar wouldn't 'a been no pac-in'-off dooel, but jes' a plain ev'y-day murder. But I scours the town, and nary a Bill Perkins could I find, and I goes back to the ship and he warn't thar, and the next day he didn't turn up, ner the next, ner nary day till the ship sailed, and then I seed he'd meant to desert f'un the fust."

The "Cap'n" leaned back reflectively.

"Gee! what would you do if you got him now?" asked Cat.

"Listen, lads, listen," continued the old man, after another puff, "I'm goin' to surprise ye. You 'spect me to say I'd reach out and wring his mis'able neck fer him, don't ye? No, no, I wouldn't. I've larned a lot since them times, and the hardest lesson I ever larned was to forgive yo' enemies, but I've learned it. Hatin' don't do yo' disposition no good and it plumb spiles yo' complexion."

A light came into the old mariner's eyes as at the attainment of a great triumph.

"I've done fergiven ev'y critter that done me any wrong on this hyuh globe. When it come to that 'ere varmint, I wrastled with my soul fer forty days right in this hyuh lighthouse, but I done it. I fergive him, an' ef he'd step up right this minute, I might screw up this old mug o' mine, but, blister my boots, I'd stick out my old flipper and I'd say, 'You low-down, ornery, sneakin' cuss, I fergive you that dirty trick you played on me thirty years ago, and, dang you, hyuh's my hand on it. I'd do that, fer I'm tryin' to do my bes' in this hyuh life. I'm tryin' not to think of nothin' but what's good. It's a lonesome life, but I'm doin' my bes', lads. I'm a-lettin' my light shine, and when I gets a little down in the mouth of a night, I says to myself, 'Bill Buffum, you're a fool. Think how happy you're a-makin' them sailormen out on the sea yonder,' and I cheers up immediate.

"I might o' been married, lads, but when I had that sort o' thing a workin' in my head, I hed the same ailment I has now, lads. I war bow-legged, and bowlegs is a powerful drawback

to mat'amony. All the gals snickers at ye, lads, and when a gal makes fun o' ye, ye might as well reef yo' sails and drift. Ye see, when I was jes' kneehigh to a hoppergrass them clapper-clawed kids in school said thet when I toddled along my legs makes a O and then they crosses sorter and makes a X, so, dang 'em, they yells ' Ox ' after me; ' fer,' says they, ' yo' legs spell it just as good or plainer then *McGuffey's Spellin' Book.*' Ef you want to be happy, boys, don't let none of yo' limbs take a hold on yo' mind."

At this point, Legs crossed his lower extremities uneasily, much to the merriment of his companions.

" What's the matter, lad? " laughed the jolly seaman. " You ain't got nothin' to worry you. I has to tack, but yo' props is long but straight, and, as long as they're straight, you kin walk away with any of 'em. That's right, lads. Don't do like me. Pick yo' gal an', when you've sighted her with your telescope, bear down the wind with all yo' sails a-bellyin'. An', blister my boots, she'll strike her colors, and she's yourn to have and to hold, ferever and mo'n ever. Amen."

With great solemnity the Cap'n drew on his pipe, and then gazed roguishly around upon his grinning audience.

"But I did go a-co'tin' once," he conceded with a sly wink. "'Twar when I come home after I'd been at sea 'bout five year. I run across one of the gals I'd knowed that knocked me down the companion way the fust time I laid a eye on her."

There was a look of startled surprise from the boys.

"I mean," Cap'n Buffum hastened to explain, with a twinkle in his eye, "I mean she drawed my heart out, lads. She was all cream and ripe peaches. 'Twarn't no gal that weared her clothes neater, an', in all my born days, I never seed finer mitts than she wore."

"What!" interrupted Legs. "The things ketchers wear?"

Cap'n Buffum laughed long and loudly. "Them was the gloves gals wore when I was young, gloves that didn't have no finger ends to 'em, so the womenfolks could show off their shiny rings and grab things good. In them days, they didn't have to take 'em off when they ate their

vittles like these hyuh slick, slippery ones the gals wear nowadays."

"What you fellows keep ha-ha-ing about?" demanded Legs, glaring on his two chums, who were indulging in horselaughs. "She might have been on a team. Didn't you see that Ladies' aggregation that came down home last year, with men along to slide bases for 'em? I never did see so many balls muffed nor as many fouls cracked nor — nor — Shut up, will you?"

The last command was evidently not intended for their host, who chuckled once more and continued: "She was this sort of baseball player, lads: she knocked me out and clean over the fence when I set down to talk sweet to her. She didn't say so, but I knowed it war my legs that done it. But time brings changes, lads; time brings almighty changes. She kept on a-knockin' and a-knockin' other felluhs out because one's eyes didn't set right and she didn't like another lad's job. She was so notional and pernickety, fust thing she knowed she was a ole maid landed high and dry in No Man's Land, she was.

"I reckon it war twenty year since I done lost sight of her when hyuh come a letter from

her to me, sayin', 'Bill dear, I'm a-dyin' and I can't die easy unless I see you befo' I go.' You could 'a knocked me down with a gull's pin-feather, lads, but 'twarn't nothin' to do but go. So I rigs myself up and takes the train and finds her house, an' when I rings, a solemn-lookin' ole woman opens the do' and shows me upstairs as sadlike as if I was goin' to a buryin', and thar in that room on them pillowshams lay the battered hull of that pretty Mary Ann I had knowed when she was a gal. Says she, sort o' dyin'-calf-like, 'Law, Bill, is that you?' And I takes her hand with one of mine, and with the other I draws out my red bandanna and I weeps regular briny tears, and then I talks ole times to sorter cheer her up till I hed to go.

"But, blister my boots, boys, 'bout the time I looks fer one o' them black framed envy-lopes to tell me Mary Ann had slipped over the horizon on her last voyage, here come a pink letter, lads. 'I didn't die,' she writes, 'an' I ain't got no notion o' dyin' now. Seems like that sweet face o' yourn jus' snatched me from the grave. I'm up and about an', 'cept fer a leetle tech o' lumbago, I'm sound as a ole kittle. A mustard

plaster and you, Bill, will make me the Mary Ann I used to be, I'm shore.' Blister my boots, she sends me 'bout six o' them health bulletins, each one healthier than the one befo', but nary a scratch has I writ. I ain't a-lookin' fer no graveyard ceremony. She wouldn't take me when I was young and she don't git me when I'm old. I'm spliced to the sea that don't never have no lumbago, an', when *she* hollers and howls and yells and carries on, it's jest to show the spunk she's got in her. I ain't takin' on no cargo at my time o' life. I'm a-sailin' light and easy till I puts in my last port."

Again Cap'n Buffum drew on his pipe, probably to hide a tear that seemed to be forming in the corner of his eye.

"Nothin' ain't goin' to down me, lads," he burst out suddenly. "It's too fine a day. It's a fine day, an' the sea looks like a fishpond, but she's like some folks; they're a-plannin' and a-plottin' their meanest when they looks the mildest. Some days I've seen the sea look jus' like that an', fus' thing you knows, my corns begins to ache and the nex' mornin' she's a-skinnin' the cat and a-cuttin' up like she done

lost her senses; an' they're a-achin' to-day sorter, an' thar ain't no tellin' what's comin' tomorrow."

"Then maybe we'll get some breakers to ride," said Cat enthusiastically, with the secret hope that the prophetic ache would continue. "But, Cap'n Buffum, tell us about some of your sea experiences. You must have had some hot ones."

"When I fust knowed the sea," proceeded the Cap'n without further urging, "them was times, them was. But I give her up because all the old windjammers was gone an' the old style steamers, an' I didn't have no taste for these new bilers and en-jines they run 'em with these days. An' I'm glad I give it up, lads, befo' them submarines sneakin' round underneath the water and things sailin' overhead had plumb spiled the sea. These hyuh inventors has plumb sp'iled it, and, as fer seamanship these days, 'tain't nothin' in it no longer.

"'Twar many a year ago I read that yarn *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea,* and says I to myself, says I, the Frenchman that wrote that ain't safe aboveboard. Then come

along a *War of the Worlds,* a tale about ships a-flyin' in the air, and I throwed that trash away, and says I, ' That's a danged sight crazier,' but, blister my boots, these hyuh submarines and them airjammers o' Hardy's, they done both come true. But I'll tell you some yarns of what I seen befo' that."

Whereupon, between puffs, Cap'n Buffum kept the audience rigid with interest for two full hours with some of his wildest experiences of the deep. Then followed an excursion to the turret and an explanation of the mechanism of the powerful revolving light. Then back to the room below they went for an inspection of his museum. This done, the host was in the midst of a recital of some of the most disastrous wrecks on the shoals of Cape Peril when Hardy turned up. With the greatest reluctance, the boys were prevailed upon to go, and then only with an understanding that they might come back again at the earliest possible opportunity.

CHAPTER V.

THE INTERRUPTED MESSAGE

The next morning Legs awoke early and, after inspecting his watch, was about to settle himself for another hour's snooze when he detected a sputtering sound and instantly recognized it as the wireless in action. Footfalls on the flat roof of the kitchen ell confirmed him in the opinion that Turner was taking or sending a message. Straightway, the youngster was seized by an itching desire to witness the apparatus in operation, and all thought of further sleep vanished.

Very softly he arose, slipped on his clothes, and was hurrying on his way to seek the outer stairway leading to the roof of the annex when he stopped short and drew back on discovering, out on the porch, Hardy and Turner (the latter evidently just arrived) deeply absorbed in conversation.

"That's what it said," Turner was announcing, "that's every last word I could get.

'Lighthouse keeper at Kitty Hawk ill. Bring Smith from Knott's Island this morning without delay. You can make it if you hurry. There's a terrible —', and that's all I could pick up, though I listened till my ears ached."

Hardy paced up and down a few moments. "Terrible what, do you suppose? Battle, murder, or sudden death?"

"You can search me. All you know is that you've got to beat it and beat it good and quick. Reckon they had too much gumption to ask you to bump a hurricane."

"Confound it!" grumbled Hardy. "When I took this job, I didn't count on carrying lighthouse keepers around over all creation. Say, run up there, will you, and try your wire again while I get some stuff together. If I've got to go, I've got to — there are no two ways about it."

As the birdman rushed through the door, he nearly unset Legs in his haste.

"Hello! Down already?" he rattled, and then, as if seized by a sudden inspiration, "Look here, old fellow, how would you like to go with me in the plane as far as Knott's Island, about twenty miles from here? I'll leave you there

with a friend of mine and pick you up on my way home this afternoon. Got to carry a light-house doctor from here to Kitty Hawk about forty miles further. How about it? Quick, right off the bat!"

The suddenness of the invitation staggered Legs and almost floored him.

"Want *me* to go?" Then after a second's hesitation. "Sure I'll go. You bet I'd like to go," said the lad, too flattered by the honor to feel much nervousness over the adventure.

"That's what I call a man! Now, come on, help me to throw some plunder into a bag."

"How 'bout calling the other fellows?" suggested the boy, on the track of the scurrying birdman.

"Hang the other fellows! We haven't got time to fool with them. Chase yourself."

In high feather, yet quivering from excitement, Legs kept at Hardy's heels as the man grabbed a small satchel from a shelf, rushed to the pantry and shoveled into the receptacle, without a word of explanation to the petrified Luke, some remains of the last evening's feast, then dashed upstairs for an aviator's coat for

himself and one for Legs; thrust into his belt the pistol which he had official license to carry; bounded from the house, and called up to Turner to know if he could squeeze anything more out of the wireless.

"Not a buzz," cried the man aloft. "Not a sizzle."

"Then come on down and help us with the plane."

As the three were jog-trotting along towards the hangar, the Tarheel prudently raised some sharp objections to Hardy's plan for the boy, but, with the assurance that the passenger was to be dropped at Knott's Island, he subsided.

Fifteen minutes later, the bird had started on its journey.

"Gee! they'll be sore," thought the rising Legs with great elation, as he waved down upon his belated companions, who came running across the sand. "This is where I score." And, snuggling in his coat, began to goggle the surrounding sky and the sea beneath with more self-possession and courage than he had on his initiation.

Over the lighthouse rose *Windjammer* and, at

a suitable elevation, was soon speeding above a sandy strip separating what appeared to be a vast inland lake on the one hand and the ocean on the other. To the lad's eyes, a singular change had taken place in the water, due to the curling whitecaps. The sky also had changed its aspect of the day before. The sun shone red and sinister through a weird mist, and from the rim of the southern horizon great clouds were surging.

Beyond the region of the landlocked waters, great stretches of woodland and the farms of the trucking land miles inland from the sand and marsh area came in view. Soon the state boundary was crossed, and immediately beneath the flyer gleamed another sand ridge, the beginning of that barrier extending, with breaks here and there, almost the whole length of the Carolina coast. For a space of ten or fifteen miles the ocean stretched boundlessly on the left, and on the right spread the upper waters of Currituck Sound. Then there came into view a sparsely wooded sandy island with groups of tiny houses at wide intervals. Now Hardy, steering to the right, crossed a narrow inlet,

hovered over a village and planed down to a grassy spot not more than a stone's throw from the marshy shoreline.

"All out for Knott's Island," sang out the pilot as he alighted under the staring eyes of a group of fishermen. "Boy, you're a seasoned birdman," he added patting the exultant lad on the shoulder. "You're wearing your wings; you're getting the bird look in your eyes. But, see here, keep off the swell-head and, while I chase off for Smith, keep a close watch on this plane and don't let any of those oyster rubes get their whiskers tangled in my propeller. I'll bring Nash back with me and turn you over to him to keep till I get back. He'll stuff you with prunes and persimmons. He has a grocery store yonder."

Hardy strode off to the shop, a few rods up the shore.

"Well, I'll be switched! Hello, sky pilot," hailed the grocer, bluff and hearty, red-headed and red-cheeked, in shirt sleeves and corduroy breeches spotted with marks of flour and other reminders of his trade. "Saw you coming with a tail to your kite. Looks more like chine than

good red herring." He shot out a stubby finger in the direction of Legs.

"Just a kid I brought along for company," explained Hardy. "But look here, have you heard — ?"

"A kid!" interrupted Nash. "Now I know you're a fool. Thought you were dippy enough to be windjammering by yourself, let alone bringing ballast with you. Haven't you heard of that gale whipping up the coast at a hundred miles an hour."

"What! What's that?" exclaimed the startled pilot. "A gale! The deuce you say!"

"What are you givin' us? Haven't you got a wire at Cape Peril?"

In hurried words, Hardy told of the broken message.

"This fills the gap then," said Nash. "Telegram came this A. M. early! 'Put storm signals out along coast. West Indian gale sweepin' north. Central now off coast of Florida.' Take a look at that barometer, will you?"

The pilot glanced at the instrument attached to the door frame.

"Doesn't look good a bit. But I reckon I can

make Kitty Hawk. Now to get that fellow Smith in a jiffy."

"You can go over and see. He was hangin' around the store yestiddy, but seems like I heard somebody say he pulled out to Roanoke Island last night on a tugboat."

"Darn!" exploded Hardy, staring vacantly about him, and then turned to rush over to Smith's cottage several hundred yards away. Twelve minutes later he was back, looking his stormiest.

"Talk about wild-goose chases!" he fumed to Nash. "That chump Smith's wife says he's gone to Dareville on business, but I'll sure find him there. She bristled and looked sour about the Kitty Hawk proposition, but I'm going to get him there if I have to make a pancake landing to do it. This is the deuce!"

"Better lie low here, that's my advice," warned Nash.

Hardy shook his head impatiently.

"Orders are orders. I learned that in the army," declared the pilot firmly. "Now if you'll keep an eye on Hatton—"

"I'll keep two on him. Here comes your

Sonny Longlegs now. Looks like he thought sompin' was after him."

He pointed to the lad sprinting toward them with such speed as he might have exhibited in front of a legion of tigers.

"Hardy! Hardy!" panted the boy as he bounded up. "Come quick! Come quick!"

There was a note of tragic insistence in his tone, but Hardy was not the sort of fellow to be stampeded.

"Great guns! What's up now?" he demanded. "What's got into you, boy?"

"One — one — one of father's lifeboats — with a hole in it — on the shore there."

He pointed tremblingly at a line of boats on the sloping bank not far from the airplane.

"Why, you're crazy. One of your father's lifeboats! He's in Mexico!"

"But I *know* it is! I *know* it is!" insisted the lad. "I found my initials I cut on it a long time ago. You don't think the yacht's gone down, do you?"

He was already dragging Hardy along, while the grocer, in dumb astonishment, toddled after on his fat, round legs.

"Keep your head, Hatton," commanded Hardy; "don't talk tommyrot. What in the name of herring could one of the yacht's boats be doing way up here?"

The boy slackened his pace a bit to rattle off his story. When Hardy had left for the store, he related, he kept an eye on the plane, but moved over closer to the beach. Among several boats lying there, one had instantly attracted his attention on account of its being a type quite different from those used by oystermen. Drawing nearer to inspect it better, he discovered that one side had been staved in as by the blows of an axe. The name on either side of the prow seemed to have been sandpapered out, but some fragments of letters still visible convinced him that the name had been *The Jolly Ruffian.* To confirm his suspicions, he found cut in the wood of the gunwale the letters *W. M. M. H.* This piece of mischief he had perpetrated five years before, and his misdeed had been deeply impressed upon him by a spanking.

Partly convinced by the story, Hardy reached the boat, inspected it carefully, and agreed with Nash that the evidence was overwhelming. The

boat undoubtedly belonged to the Hatton yacht.

Most of the neighboring fishermen had gathered about the plane, but one weatherbeaten old fellow sat mending a net by the waterside, stopping every now and then to cast uneasy glances at the trio pow-wowing over the lifeboat.

"Who's this smashed-in boat belong to?"

"My boat," shouted back the old man in a tone that implied, "And what business is it of yours?"

"Wouldn't mind coming over and telling us where you got it, would you?" urged Nash.

The fisherman arose and walked over deliberately.

"Go ahead and tell him, Mr. Hall," coaxed Nash when the man arrived. "He's all right."

"Buy it?" quizzed Hardy, in a hurry to be done with the business and off on his errand.

"No, I didn't," was the brusque reply. "It ain't yourn, is it? What you askin' fer?"

"To come right to the point, my friend, this boat here looks very much like one I've seen before, and I'd just like for curiosity to know how it came here."

"They're all right," encouraged Nash once

more. "Tell 'em. You're a friend of mine, ain't you?"

"Well, if you're a friend of Tom Nash thar," he drawled, jerking his head towards the grocer, "I don't mind talkin', but I ain't much set on unloadin' my own business on strangers. And what's more, I say nobody ain't goin' to get their hands on this boat unless they can prove it b'longs to 'em. That's whar I stand. The way I come across it was this way. Less'n two weeks ago I was out dredgin' my oyster beds 'bout two shouts and a fling from hyuh and the tongs got hold o' sumpin' that felt powerful funny. Me and my son, we jerks and jerks, but couldn't move it a peg. Then I gets a boy to dive down and feel of it, and the boy, says he, 'It's a boat, a rowboat.' Then me and my son gets a big iron hook and a chain and hitches on to that boat in 'bout fifteen feet o' water and hauls it over to the shallow marsh and drags it asho' and with that thar hole stove in it. I asked everybody I seed, and nobody don't know nary a thing 'bout whar it come from. Then I says, it's mine till somebody can prove a claim to it, that's what I says."

"Then you have no suspicion as to who sunk it or where it came from? Nobody suspicious been seen around?" persisted Hardy.

"No, sir, not so far as I knows," declared the witness, and then, after a few moments' hesitation, he pointed to a lanky man in an oilskin coat in the group around the airplane. "I recollect Joe Turpin, that tallest man yonder, did say that he give some grub to a tramp one night 'bout the time I found the boat. He said he came from Roanoke Island and his name was Buffalo Dare or some such."

Unable to get any further information from Hall, Hardy directed the excited Hatton to stay where he was while he himself interviewed the man in oilskin. Joe Turpin answered the questions after some coaxing. The stranger, he asserted, was a short, stocky, smooth-faced man with a rattlesnake sort of eye, but he stood out of the light with a slouch hat pulled down over him face, and the witness wasn't sure he could recognize him if he saw him in the daylight.

"He wore sto' clothes," continued Turpin, "and didn't look like our folks. He paid for his food. Said he was an Indian traveling to Dare

County and that his name was Buffalo Dare."

This source of evidence exhausted, Hardy found that the other men in the group had no knowledge whatever of the stranger, so he hurried back to the oysterman for a last word.

"I don't want no other folks' belongin's," insisted the old man, "but nobody ain't goin' to get that boat but the lawful owner, and then only when he forks out fifteen dollars fer haulin' it out of the oyster bed. It was wuth every cent of it, and it kilt some o' my young oysters, too."

"Now, Hatton," said the pilot, turning to the boy, who had followed every word of the oysterman with breathless interest. "You stay here with Nash and don't worry. You know your father's been heard from. I s'pose one of his boats got adrift when he laid over in the Sound, and that's all there is to it. I've wasted too much time already. Nash, take care of him till I get back."

Legs, however, was in no mood to be shaken off. As fast as the words could tumble out of his mouth, he argued he must get to Roanoke Island to find out something further; it would be

impossible for him to stay in that lonesome spot, and so on. Hardy frowned, looked fierce, positively refused to let him go, melted a little, and then, after a short consultation with Nash about the prospects of the weather for the next hour, finally gave in.

"Anything to keep the peace; but if the wind gets stiffer I'm going to land and leave you even if it's in a wilderness twenty miles from civilization."

Up went the bird, amid the wondering longshoremen, the pilot steering from Currituck Sound to the mainland; he then left Currituck County behind, passed over Dare County, and, turning east across a narrow inlet, drove across Roanoke Island in a freshening breeze, hovered over a hamlet, glided down, and landed even keel in the outskirts of Dareville on the seaward side of the island.

CHAPTER VI

THE HAUNTS OF BUFFALO DARE

When the pilot had safely landed at Dareville, inquiry brought out the news that Smith had gone to Manteo, a settlement two miles away. It was getting to be a needle hunt in a haystack and, with the wind rising every moment, Hardy was growing desperate. He felt very much as an angry porcupine looks, and expressed himself accordingly to a group of villagers. The offer of an obliging citizen to go post-haste in his auto for the elusive Smith was eagerly accepted.

"If this ain't the dickens!" exploded Hardy to Legs. "If I ever get my hands on that son of a gun, fat chance he'll have to wriggle out till I drive his head into the Kitty Hawk light-house. What's the use of getting hot, though?" he concluded. "It's all in a lifetime. Let's go over to that swell hotel there and eat while we're waiting."

Legs began to press the Buffalo Dare mystery.

"Look here," argued the pilot, "my first job

is to load and unload Smith. In an hour and a half, at the outside, I'll be back, and it looks like a dead certainty we'll be marooned here all night and maybe all tomorrow and, for all I know, a whole week. Oodles of time for detective work. But to tell you the honest truth, Hatton, I don't see why you plague yourself about that boat business. Don't look so bilious. You'll have some fun before you die."

Legs quieted down and Hardy was busy with his own thoughts till the pair reached the Sir Walter Raleigh Tavern, a dilapidated two-story building just opposite the general merchandise store known as "The Emporium," which latter also housed the postoffice. Through this last fact the loafers on the Raleigh porch had the tremendous advantage of gazing on every man, woman, and child in the village at some period of the day. The newcomers passed some of these idle gentry as they entered the doorway and found themselves in a long dining room, one corner of which served as the office of the landlord, the principal function of whose desk seemed the support of his pair of very dirty boots.

Of the eight tables, one was occupied by a tall

individual whose back was turned to the pilot and his companion. A waiter was sauntering around, apparently trying to persuade himself that he was busy with a mop and a bucket. Two clodhoppers, one with the round, yellow face of a Hallowe'en pumpkin and the other possessing the sharp, startled look of a rabbit, were standing by a window lazily engaged with their toothpicks.

Hardy, addressed as "Brother" by the landlord, was informed he could get coffee and ham and eggs.

"Long sweetenin' or short in yo' coffee?" inquired the negro waiter when he found time for the order.

Hardy decided on "short," explaining to the puzzled lad that "long" was molasses, very popular in these regions — a fact which had not escaped the attention of the flies, as attested by their swarming over everything.

For a minute or so, the two men by the window stared at the newcomers in solemn silence; then, removing their toothpicks, they abruptly launched into the following dialogue:

"Looks like we was goin' to have some

weather," drawled Rabbit-face, casting an eye up toward the window like a duck looking for thunder. "Blowin' right smart, ain't it?"

"Certain sho' is!" returned his friend, on the same key. "Tain't no fittin' time fer them submarines to be flyin' in, is it?"

"What you talkin' 'bout, Bill Hulfish? Submarines don't fly; they swims and dives in the ocean same as fish do. Them's airyplanes you mean. I seen two o' them there things at the State F'ar 'bout a mile up in the air, and a fool stepped off'n one smack on t'other same as you step out o' yo' kitchen back do' right spank in the hawgpen."

"Git out, Jim," observed Pumpkin-face, without showing any heat at the insinuation that he lived cheek by jowl with his porkers.

"Fac'," asserted Rabbit-face.

"Well, I'll be jiggered! He was danged crazy," inferred Pumpkin.

"If fools is fools 'taint no business o' mine or yourn, is it?" queried Rabbit-face. "Ev'ybody to their taste as the old woman said when she up and kissed the heifer."

"I don't say contrary. All the lunytics ain't

been put in the 'sylum yet, or if they has been, some has bus' loose."

"Ought to be a open season fer huntin' them sort o' birds all the year roun'," decided Rabbit.

Whereupon they looked at one another, laughed hoarsely, and dropped into a stare at the bird-man and his fledgling, showing as clearly as glances can that they were the target of the last remark. Hardy was not touchy, but he couldn't resist twisting about and returning a challenging stare. As this movement brought to view the weapon at his belt, the rustics decided the season was not quite so open as they had thought, hitched at their breeches, sidestepped, and scuttled out of the door, much to the amusement of Legs as well as of the landlord.

During the wait for the lunch and while they were eating, Hardy answered Legs' questions with regard to the famous Blackbeard who met his end in these regions. From this he passed on to mention of the early explorers.

"Near here," he related, "were the Indian villages discovered by the expeditions sent out by Sir Walter Raleigh, who named this country Virginia in honor of the Virgin Queen. The first

expedition landed in July, 1584. At the north end of this island, I've seen the spot where they say the original village of the Indians stood — nine houses built of cedar and fortified with stakes.

"In 1585, the next year, another expedition came out, and the white men were well treated by the savages. These Englishmen brought with them a painter named John White, who carried back to Queen Elizabeth water-color pictures he made of the natives. One funny thing he said in his account was that the savages built platforms in their cornfields and made a squaw sit on a chair up there and keep up a terrible squawking and howling to scare off the beasts and birds from the crops — human scarecrows and pretty lively ones, I'll say.

"Now the last expedition sent out is supposed to have been cleaned out completely by the Indians. The word *Croatan* carved on the bark of a tree was the only mark left by them that could be found. By the way, before this, the wife of a man who rejoiced in the cheerful name of Ananias Dare, kin to our friend Buffalo, I dare say, gave birth to a daughter named Vir-

ginia Dare, and she was the first English child born on American soil. Some people claim the lost Englishmen married into the Indian tribes and that descendants of theirs are still living, but that's all hot air."

While Hardy, to cover his impatience, was enlightening the interested lad, the individual eating with his back turned had begun to show more attention to the pilot's story than to his own meal. He started to clear his throat, rattle his knife and fork, work his shoulders and display other marks of bodily disturbance. But when Hardy paused after his "hot air" statement, the stranger, a tall gaunt man with a shock of red hair, bounded up and displayed flaming eyes to the pair at the other table.

"I'm hot air, am I? Hot air, hot air, hot air!"

And then, without attempting any violence against Hardy and Legs, who jumped up ready to defend themselves, he seized his hat and, tossing his head, rushed from the room.

Before the two guests had quite recovered from their astonishment, the landlord, his sides shaking with mirth, came over to explain.

"Crazy as a Junebug, but harmless, only you tread on his toes good and proper. His name is Ketcham, but he thinks he's a descendant of that Virginia Dare, so the kids around here call him Buffalo Dare and run after him yelling, 'You ketch him; I'll skin him.'"

"Buffalo Dare!" exclaimed Legs, popping his eyes.

"Does this man ever row around in a boat?" asked Hardy eagerly. "Does he ever go over to Knott's Island?"

"He never rowed nothin' but a herring," returned the landlord, chuckling at his own jest. "Row nothin', and I've seen him every day fer years. He eats here on a meal ticket his brother pays for. He's harmless, so they don't put him in the bughouse. Just gets daffy when the kids pester him about that Buffalo business."

"But, say, Hardy," interposed Legs, not fully recovered from his start, "I bet he *is* the same man, though."

"Couldn't be," objected Hardy. "The fellow seen on the island was short and smooth-faced and black; this crazy loot has red whiskers."

Legs was about to push the subject further

when there was commotion in front of the inn, announcing the arrival of the auto with Smith.

"Can't talk, boy," shouted the pilot, throwing Legs some money to pay for the lunch. "Here, stay here and wait for me. Good-bye, I'm gone. Back in less'n two hours, sure."

Out of the door flashed the birdman, seized the protesting Smith, swore the wind wouldn't hurt a kitten, and dragged him off almost bodily in the direction of the plane. Legs followed, but in the excitement got no attention and very forlornly watched the hurried preparation of the pilot and his speedy departure in the teeth of a good stiff wind sweeping over the Sound.

The hours dragged heavily by, one, two, three, four, still no Hardy. At the end of two hours, in fact, no rational person could be expected to venture anywhere in an airship. The first good, strong whip of the gale was in evidence, and with it came dark and threatening rain clouds. Time and again, Legs hurried down to the shore and gazed over the waters in the direction of Kitty Hawk. Gulls were circling landward with plaintive cries. Every now and then, one of these marine birds, a speck in the far distance,

would tempt him for a moment to believe the plane was on its way.

Boats speeded shoreward under all the force of the oars; but none of the disembarking longshoremen reported having seen the plane since it sailed seaward. Indeed, they thought it an idiotic question to ask. With the fourth hour of Hardy's absence, the wind was blowing with such velocity and driving the rain in such torrents, that Legs, unable to hold out any longer, wended his way back to the shelter of the hotel.

"No use to worry," consoled the landlord. "You might 'a knowed he wouldn't try to get back a evenin' like this. If he didn't get spilled on his way over he's high and dry in the lighthouse. I'll take care of you, and won't let Buffalo Dare get your scalp."

Legs, irritated by the last part of this speech, and alarmed by the first, gazed disconsolately out of the window at the driving rain and listened with sinking heart to the dismal howling of the wind. What with the lifeboat mystery on his mind, the appearance of the madman and his own loneliness, he had never felt quite so miserable before in all his days.

CHAPTER VII

THE BIRD HAD FLOWN

Scarcely had Hardy, Turner, and Legs left the premises that eventful morning when Jimmy opened his eyes, blinked them in the sun's rays, and, sitting up between the sheets, looked about him. There lay Cat on his back, mouth open, still far away in dreamland. Legs's cot, on the other hand, displayed the narrow mould of his form, but nothing more substantial. Except for Miller's heavy breathing, an uncanny silence pervaded the house.

"Eh, Sleeping Beauty," yelled the tormenter, partly from that boy instinct for raising the roost when not asleep one's self. "You blue-eyed Catfish, wake up there, hear me?"

To lend force to his command he hurled his pillow with deliberate aim at the sleeper. Either the yell or the pillow or both had the effect. Cat's eyes popped open on the instant.

"Confound you, Jimmy Todd, what'd you wake me up for when I was right that second

digging my fingers down in one of old Blackbeard's chests and raking out gold by the handful?" he demanded as soon as he took in the situation. "I'd been a millionaire in just 'bout two more minutes."

"Maybe that's what that slick Legs is up to, without dreaming," suggested the other. "Look! He's flew the coop."

Cat surveyed Legs's vacant bunk, bounced from his own bed, and rushed to take a look at the ocean from the window.

"Don't see him in," announced the observer. "But golly, Jimmy, Tom Hardy's sunball looks red and funny, and the sea's got some nifty jell to her today. I b'lieve old Buffum's barometer's working. We'll get some surf today, boy, sure!"

The aid was tepid and soft, with a brisk breeze blowing. The waves that the day before had washed the beach languidly and rolled back just as lazily, this morning were splashing away in hurly-burly fashion.

"We sure will," agreed Jimmy, planting himself by his companion. "But where you s'pose Legs is. Can't be more'n seven o'clock. Not near breakfast time yet. Let's raise the roof."

The speaker ran to the door and yelled "Legs!" at the top of his lungs. No answer.

Mystified, the two barefooted boys pattered along the hall, peeping into Hardy's room and into Turner's in succession. Both were empty.

"Hardy!" they both shouted together as loudly as they could bawl.

Dead silence.

"Turner, ah, Turner!" they shrilled. Same result.

"What you reckon's happened?" speculated Cat, inferring some pleasure jaunt of which he and Jimmy were being cheated. "Come on! Let's go down and see!"

Back to their rooms they darted, slipped on their shoes, and adding nothing else to their sleeping costume, bounded down the stairway.

"Not a soul in sight but that old one-eyed witch. Scat!" cried Jimmy, gazing about and then striding from one window to another.

At the commotion, Luke cropped up from the pantry.

"Where in the mischief are the others?" demanded Cat.

"I dunno where they gone," returned the

mulatto. "Heard Turner buzzin' 'round with that there wireless o' his'n jus' now, and then he come in and got Hardy and say sumpin', and then I see Hardy and Legs runnin' round like chicken with their heads cut off, and then they grab some cold vittles from the pantry, and bus' out the do', and, last I seed of 'em, all three was a-makin' tracks out to-wards that there airy-plane gayraje. Look like they done gone crazy."

The information added fuel to the lads' burning curiosity. "Come on, come on, Jimmy, don't let 'em put one like that over on us," Cat exhorted, starting for the entrance.

"I'm with you," shouted Jimmy.

And the two scantily attired forms shot out of the door, sprang down the steps, rounded the house, and ploughed along at their best speed over the sandy pathway.

From the top of one of the dunes, the sight that greeted their eyes spurred them on to new exertion. There in the distance stood the *Windjammer* ready for a flight. Hardy and Legs were climbing to their seats while Turner appeared to be making ready to give them a send-off.

"Look, Jimmy, look!" sputtered Cat.

"That's what I call a low-down, scurvy trick."

"Blamed if it ain't," panted Jimmy, who had used up all his wind in his effort to keep on the heels of the flying Cat.

The latter now made a still more strenuous spurt, but, despite the utmost exertion of both the lads, they struggled up, breathless and panting, to Turner's side, only to see the aircraft a hundred feet above their reach and mounting every second.

A wave of the hand from the triumphant passenger added to their cup of bitterness, as did also a playful grin with which the Tarheel greeted them.

"Grab 'em, boys, grab 'em," Turner joked grimly. "How 'bout some salt to sprinkle on the bird's tail?"

"What's this mean?" demanded Cat as soon as he could get his wind, keeping his eye glued fast on the ever-mounting flyer.

Along with a choice spice of kidding from the solemn-looking Turner, the reason for the abrupt departure came out bit by bit.

"I don't see what he took Legs for," snarled Jimmy. "Might have given *us* a show."

"Don't worry, he ain't goin' far," was the consolation. "Hardy's goin' to stick some stamps on him and send him back by parcel post. I think he took him because he's a math. shark."

"Oh, golly, Jimmy, why couldn't we squeeze Whiskers for a brainful?" said Cat ruefully. "First time I knew that stuff would get you where you could have some fun."

"Say, boys, stop lookin' up there for starfish," drawled Turner, after the crestfallen pair had watched the bird dwindle and vanish in the distance. "It's an ill wind that doesn't blow somebody good. How would you two persimmon-mouths like to take a little skim over the briny in my hydro after breakfast?"

The dismal faces bloomed in a twinkling. The news was like a refreshing shower to two wilted strawberries.

"Oh, Jimmy," yelled Cat, dancing around with his companion in a frenzy of enthusiasm. "Old Legs can have his lift. We're the lucky guys, I'll say."

"And we'll anchor the flying ship over there

by the fish-nets, and do a little angling," further promised the Tarheel.

A shout of approval greeted the suggestion.

"Might hook a reed bird or two," added Turner.

"Reed bird!" echoed Jimmy.

"Sure, that's what we call red herring down home."

The lads were all eyes, ears and expectation; and, with full-grown appetites, trudged on with their leader back towards Seagulls' Nest.

"Hope there's more game in the ocean than there is outside," remarked Jimmy, looking down the deserted beach when the three were crossing the sand hills. "Gosh! I'd like to hunt and fish up in the Arctic where the water and the shore swarms with polar bears and sea-birds and the seals and penguins. Remember those polar travelogues, Cat? What got my eye was the way those penguins flopped along just like this. Look! Darn if they didn't have the Charlie Chaplin shuffle to a finish."

At this point, Jimmy paused to give a piece of mimicry that drew a roar from Cat and a chuckle from Turner.

"He and you must have taught 'em," joked Cat, as the clown's legs sprang back to the perpendicular. "But, say, don't forget about whales when you are talking about big game. They tell me some little ones have been washed up on the beach down this far."

"Some winters they seem to get the wanderlust," drawled Turner. "One was washed up at Virginia Beach a couple of years ago, and I believe that wasn't the first they'd found."

Suddenly an idea, a bright one, occurred to Jimmy.

"Don't reckon they laid any eggs around here, do you? A whale's egg must be a whopper."

The Tarheel's face spread and he broke into a low cackle. Cat caught the cue on the instant.

"Don't you know, bonehead, that whales don't lay eggs," he struck in, looking wondrous wise.

"They don't!" exclaimed Jimmy, only half induced to believe the fact.

"They produce snarks," mildly observed Turner, breaking into a full-sized grin.

"I'll say, Jimmy," hooted Cat, "you just pulled a whale bone."

"That's right, grin your silly head off," retorted Jimmy, in no pleasant humor; "but talking of burying, that gibe needs a first class funeral, with mourners blubbering."

"Don't know so much about that," objected Cat, with his grinniest grin. "If I don't tell this on you when I get back, my name's not Cat Miller."

"I *dare* you," threatened Jimmy fiercely.

"Dare some more!"

"I double-dare you," shot back Jimmy, and, after these words, the speaker proceeded to cup his hands and whisper in Cat's ear.

Whatever it was, it had a magical effect.

"I resign," said Cat meekly, and added coaxingly, "Say, for Pete's sake, don't let that get out or I'm ruined. I'll can the whale's egg, swear I will."

The matter being thus adjusted, much to Turner's amusement, the lads shed their garments, dashed into the ocean for a dip, and were dressed and heavily engaged at breakfast fifteen minutes later.

"Needn't hurry so," admonished Turner. "I ain't goin' for an hour after grubbin', anyway."

And, in spite of all their urging, he wouldn't.

"To kill time, tell you what I will do, though," he conceded when all were standing on the porch after the meal was finished. "I'll try you with a little pistol practice, that's what I'll do."

This was reasonably consoling. So, fetching his automatic and a box of shells and adding to his equipment a dozen apples from the storeroom, he issued out on the lawn, where the eager scouts were awaiting him.

Placing one of the smaller apples on a convenient post and taking his stand at fifty paces distance he squinted an eye, aimed, and in three shots had plugged the target into fragments.

Loud applause from the two spectators greeted this feat.

"How did you get to be such a crack shot?" Cat wanted to know.

"You see it was this way," confided the Tarheel. "Down home on the Pasquotank the musskeeters grow so almighty big and get so monstrous vicious I had to lay in bed of a night and have my fun wingin' 'em with a pistol. They were the size of Scuppernong grapes, and that's no fairy tale."

"Ha! ha!" said Cat and Jimmy echoed.

"Now, you, William Tell," said the joker, handing the pistol to the little chap, after a fresh apple had been placed in position. "Your shot!"

The short fellow cocked his eye, fired, missed his goal in all three attempts, but created considerable stir in a sand bank beyond. Miller followed, and, after two misses, nicked his apple. He beamed with satisfaction, swelled visibly and crowed over his companion.

Before an hour's practice was over, however, both the lads, though they had not quite attained the mosquito-winging stage, had improved tremendously, and their instructor, seemingly greatly gratified with his pupils, suggested getting the tackle together and making for the seaplane.

CHAPTER VIII

PLUGGING A MAN-EATER

"I don't like this line-fishing," asserted Turner as he prowled around the store-room. "I've been used to fishing with a rod and reel on the Pasquotank and I can't get over the habit."

No rod was in sight, however, but he suddenly hit on the expedient of taking a pole with a hook in the end, used by Luke for some domestic purpose.

"I haven't got any reel," the Tarheel continued, "but I'll hitch my line on the end of this, like Simple Simon, and see how the fish take to new inventions."

Soon the three, equipped for their sport, proceeded to Lake Herring, and filed out on the narrow plank bridge to the nest of the hydroplane. As Turner proceeded to make all needful preparations for the flight, the two scouts, although familiar with the seaplanes that soared over Hampton Roads, found novel points of

interest in the improved prow and high curved tail of this biplane flying boat.

The tank filled and fishing tackle stowed, the pilot nimbly climbed to his seat, the lads scrambled to theirs just behind, the propeller set to threshing, and off went the bird skimming the tranquil waters for a hundred feet, then rose upon the air like some magic creature of Eastern fable. Over the lake she soared, left the sand bar behind, and sped along far above the combers.

For twenty minutes, that seemed but one to the enraptured scouts, she circled over the deep; then planed gracefully till she tipped the water; spanked along over the waves until she lost her momentum, and was brought to a halt as the pilot cast anchor at a point no great distance from the spot where the fishnets had been set for their prey.

Not many minutes later Turner, with a line attached to the end of his hook-tipped pole, was manipulating this clumsy instrument more as a joke than with any great expectation of results. Jimmy, sitting cross-legged on the starboard side of the boat, was line-fishing, and had already landed two mullets and a small alewife. On the

other side Cat, shoes off, with his feet dangling, was engaged in the more thrilling and productive pastime of crabbing. The net that lay beside him was frequently called into play to scoop in some unwary shellfish toled to the surface by the cautiously raised piece of meat suspended from a line. The victims, squirming and clawing, were dumped into the cockpit to create a small pandemonium about the toes of the long-suffering pilot.

Suddenly, this peaceful scene was shattered by a wild yell from Miller, who fell back, feet in air, as if propelled by some powerful spring, and rolled against Jimmy. The latter, struggling to his feet, gazed upon a pallid face and two staring, terror-stricken eyes. Turner, startled from his own pursuit, whirled about, and as his glance passed from the terrified boy to the water in search of the source of the commotion, his eyes fell upon a pale bluish torpedo-shaped body of monster proportions, in the act of rolling to one side, exhibiting, as it did so, a gleaming white belly and, below the muzzle, a hideous many-toothed mouth agape in preparation for snapping the meat bait.

"Good heaven!" almost shrieked the ordinarily stolid pilot. "A shark, it's a shark!"

Jimmy, after scrambling to his feet, had dragged up the terrified Cat, and the two, hugging one another and shuddering, were staring down at the object of their terror.

"For heaven's sake, hold on! Don't slip, your life depends on it," cried Turner as without a moment's hesitation he vaulted from the cockpit, dragging the pole out after him. Supporting himself by the framework of the well with one hand, he thrust the hooked end of the pole with unerring aim with the other straight into the gaping maw of the monster and, with a powerful twist of the wrist, jabbed and dug the iron in behind the triple teeth of his prey. Instantly the shark began to writhe and squirm and flip his huge tail so convulsively that the airship was shaken from stem to stern. For the man, it was question of releasing the pole in a very few seconds or being dragged overboard.

"Cat — Jimmy!" he yelled, "my pistol here — belt — shoot — head or belly — quick — quick!"

The two lads, forgetting their own plight in

the imminent peril that seemed to confront Turner, made a grab for the weapon at the same time, but Miller was the first to close his hand over the butt, snatching the weapon from the holster.

By a supreme effort, the man still clutched the pole, his teeth clenched and with a desperate look on his tense face.

"Shoot — shoot!" he commanded.

Cat's form became rigid, he thrust his arm downward, tightened a finger on the trigger, and as a swelling wave brought the great fish a foot closer, he plumped shell after shell at his victim. The first steel plopped the water, but the rest found their marks in the head and throat. After several tremendous churning flips and convulsions, the creature rose and fell an inert mass on the surface of the water.

Turner, heaving a sigh from the bottom of his chest, released his hold on the pole and staggered back against the cockpit.

"Thank God!" he gasped as every muscle relaxed from the tremendous tension. "That was a man's shot! Cat, boy, it gives me the shivers all over even now to think of what might

have happened to you in another minute. A shark, a blue shark, not the worst kind, thank heaven, but devil enough! "

He passed the back of his arm over his forehead to wipe away the sweat that stood in great beads.

Cat and Jimmy, still shuddering, were unable to take their gaze from the great, grinning, now bloody, mouth of the floating monster, rising and falling with the waves and thudding against the boat side.

" Gosh! " exclaimed Cat shakily, his heart still pounding. " Seven feet long if he's an inch." And then his invincible turn for jesting came upon him. " Plenty of room for you inside, Jimmy," he added with a forced grin.

The boy stooped to pick up the pistol that had slipped from his hand and was on the point of rolling overboard.

" You did it," admitted Jimmy. " You paralyzed him, believe me, you sure did paralyze him."

" Back to your seats," directed Turner, " they go in schools. May be some more around, and I don't think I care to tackle another just now."

"Can't we land him?" asked Cat, with rising bravado, as pride in his feat began to assert itself.

"I'll attend to the landing part," retorted Turner, pushing the lads towards the cockpit. "Get back and stop talking."

The mysterious commotion on the floating hydro had already created a tremendous flutter among the fishermen, and at the climax of the pistol shots one boat had put out and was swiftly nearing the scene of the mystery.

"It's a shark," shouted Turner to the oncoming rowers.

Instantly the men rested on their oars.

"Dead?" inquired one excitedly.

"As he ever will be!" bawled Turner.

"Gosh!"

"Ain't any more o' them things prowlin' around, is there?" the man was anxious to know.

"No," yelled Turner, "come on. Land him for us and it means ten dollars for you."

The offer of money had a magnetic effect. The man took his seat once more, and all pulled for the plane with a will, keeping a sharp lookout as they did so. Drawing up alongside, the crew,

under directions of the Tarheel, secured the shark in tow by means of an anchor barb attached to a rope, and made ready to return to shore.

"First time I ever heard tell of goin' fishin' with a pistol," declared the skipper after hearing a full account of the episode. "You folks has sho' learned me a new one."

"Now, boys," said Turner as the scouts watched the boat pull away with their huge prize in tow, "let's get out of here in a jiffy. The wind's rising, so we'll beat it. Believe I've got a steady enough hand for the joy-rod by this time."

"Let her clip," approved the triumphant Cat, and off went the plane. She rose, breasting the wind, circled gracefully, and a few minutes later was back at her starting point.

"Poor old Legs," Cat grieved as the three made their way back to headquarters. "Just think, he's trying to kill time on that lonesome Knott's Island, while we've pulled off the biggest show ever seen on this old coast. But, golly, if his props had been hanging where mine were, that brute certainly would have put a

crimp in him. On the other hand, Jimmy's are so short the whale wouldn't have noticed them."

"That's all right," retorted Jimmy, "you notice the shortest fellows always dance with the tallest girls."

"Ain't girls soft!" propounded Cat.

"I don't know, are they?" asked Jimmy as one appealing to authority.

"This is strictly a stag party," put in Turner. "No discussing the softer sex on a shark hunt. I wonder how Hardy is making it," he suddenly changed the subject. "I believe there's a blow coming up."

"S'pose he took Legs all the way?" Jimmy wanted to know.

"He's got a little sense. Hatton's safe in the pickle shop on Knott's Island. But I'm afraid Hardy may have had to land somewhere short of Kitty Hawk."

"Can't a plane stand a pretty high wind?" asked Cat.

"In France, I've seen 'em in a small-sized hurricane," answered Turner with a laugh, "but that was war, and you might as well take chances one way as another. But, in peace

times, most folks look out for their own skins. Fact is, though, to an experienced pilot, there's not much danger if the velocity of the wind isn't greater than the speed of the motor."

When the party reached the house, Luke came out with the news that the coast guard, a short time before, had brought the report of the oncoming gale. While Turner made a rush for his wireless, the lads stopped to recount to their audience of one of the blood-curdling incident through which they had just passed.

"Got a message," announced Turner half an hour later. "Hardy hasn't been heard from yet, but there's nothing strange about that, as he hasn't had time to get to Kitty Hawk with the stops he had to make." His tone was a trifle disturbed. "There's something else," he continued. "Hatton's father's yacht is coming up the coast and trying to reach Hampton Roads ahead of the gale. He won't be able to stop anywhere. From the latitude given when the yacht wirelessed, she ought to pass us by early this evening."

For a moment the lads' faces fell as the yacht trip they had counted on went up in smoke.

"Gee! I thought it was in Cuba, and wouldn't be up for four days. That's what Legs told us," said Cat.

"That's what I don't understand," returned Turner, "Something important must have hurried him. But I'm telling you all I could get."

"Well, if he had stopped," remarked Jimmy, in a tone of some relief, "he wouldn't have found Legs around and I bet you there'd been some hot times raised."

"That's so," conceded Turner. "I reckon it's just as well he shouldn't know about that wild goose chase. Doggone it! I wish Hardy hadn't been fool enough to take this trip."

"Don't think there's really any danger, do you?" demanded Jimmy anxiously.

"Oh, no!" explained Turner. "No more danger than we're in right now."

He had changed his tone directly he noticed the effect his remark had had on the boys, and then, to divert any more conjectures, hastened to suggest a trip over to the fishing settlement to inspect their prize. Instantly, shark filled every corner of the lads' minds and off started the three.

"Well, sharks *do* lay eggs — at least, some do — a couple at a time," informed Turner.

"I know," Cat struck in, "those black things with points to 'em you pick up on the beach."

"They're the cases, not the eggs," corrected the Tarheel.

"Somebody else's dome is solid ivory," Jimmy thrust at Cat. For answer Miller returned a comical leer.

"Those are the empty cases," proceeded Turner. "The young sharks, when hatched, break through the case at the weakest place. Some folks call those black pill-boxes 'mermaids' purses.' I reckon, because the fishy ladies keep their powder puffs and beauty jiggers in 'em," he added, with a knowing chuckle. "But, speakin' of sharks, there are other fish kin to 'em without havin' their shape and bad habits. The dogfish infestin' these waters is one of 'em."

"That's where you have to beat it, Cat," flashed Jimmy.

"I'm the burr kind of cat," objected Miller, "the kind that lights on a dog's back and buries in. You can't shake this Cat off, sonny."

"The only Simon-pure, pious, kind-hearted, law-abiding, Sunday-school shark I ever heard of," Turner went on, "was one I was reading about the other day, a freak variety, white all over. He was called the Pilot shark of New Zealand. His parlor trick was to guide every ship through a narrow, dangerous pass between the rocks by leaping, diving and cutting up capers in front of the bow till the craft got to safety. The sailors swore they couldn't bribe him from his path of duty by chuckin' meat to him. Even Mrs. Shark and the little Sharkeys couldn't entice him till he had finished his job."

"You believe that?" demanded Cat skeptically.

"I saw it in a paper," declared Turner. "'Nuf said."

CHAPTER IX

WARNINGS IN THE AIR

When Turner and the boys reached the beach skirting the fishing settlement, a group of about twenty men were inspecting the booty stretched out on the sand. Among the spectators stood the bandy-legged Cap'n Buffum, who, getting wind of the adventure, had waddled down to gloat over the prize with his own eyes.

Loud plaudits greeted the arrival of the intrepid heroes. Cat in particular was the object of attention, and, under the admiration, swelled like a pouter pigeon. It was the proudest moment of the near six thousand days of his eventful life.

"Here's my hand to all of ye," said Buffum, with heartfelt pleasure, suiting the action to the word. "I never had no use for them flyin' ships befo', a-droppin' bombs and scrap iron to mess up good seaworthy vessels, but if they kin light and scavenger the ocean o' varmints like these

hyuh, I'll vote for 'em good and hearty. But where's Hardy and that leggy lad?"

Turner proceeded to explain the occasion of their absence.

"Them lighthouse superintendents is cracked to be sendin' men kitin' aroun' in the air, with a storm dead-ahead. They don't git Bill Buffum a-sailin' hither and thither. I was give my lighthouse job to set, and set like hardtack I will aginst all the flyin' powers in creation."

"That reminds me," said Turner. "I got a wireless that Commodore Hatton's yacht is due to pass sometime this evening. He's young Hatton's father. Keep your light burning."

"I'll have it extry bright," promised the ex-mariner, "but if I had my hands on them there wires I'd 'a tol' him to snug in some handy port, for, take a Jack tar's word for it, it'll be blowin' great guns and loaded ones, with Old Nick servin' 'em, by sundown."

On the outskirts of the group of brawny fishermen gathered about the shark, stood a man who seemingly was not of the company, though he wore a longshoreman's oilskin coat reaching nearly to the heels of his rubber boots, while a

hat of the same material covered his head and shadowed the upper part of his face. A bushy black beard was most conspicuously in evidence.

As Buffum and Turner had begun to talk, he had drawn closer to the two, but now as Buffum suddenly looked sharply about, the stranger whirled around, sauntered away and appeared to be idly inspecting the ocean.

"Who's that thar felluh?" asked the light-house keeper of one of the fishermen, pointing at the same time at the intruder.

"I ain't seen him befo'," declared the one addressed, "He tol' some of the folks at the settlement jus' now that he come from Belle Haven and was waiting for the mail carrier to take him to Millford."

"He don't look like no genuwine fisherman to me," asserted Buffum, staring keenly after the now retreating figure.

"Nor me neither," agreed the other. "Ain't set up right."

"Hope that 'ere yacht will keep well out at sea," continued the Cap'n, turning to Turner once more. "The Cape Peril shoals ain't got no respect for Commodores or for Admirals either.

They don't salute nobody as I ever heard of. What's that 'ere Hatton Commodore of?"

Turner explained that it was merely a complimentary title conferred on the yacht owner by his cronies.

"His handle come off'n the same bush as mine did," chuckled the old fellow. "If you've ever blowed a whistle on the sea or fired a popgun at a clay pigeon on land and gits a few years on ye, these folks shoots a Cap'n or a Gen'ral at ye. I knowed a man once who was a gen'ral nuisance, and his acquaintances — he didn't have no friends — all called him 'Gen'ral.' It's the same as the police force. You calls 'em all 'officer.' Thar ain't no more prives left above the sod. But Gen'ral or Commodore, I'll have the light fer him. Let the wind blow high or low, the light's always a-burnin'; and if they come close enough to the shoals to see it and don't go a-scootin' off like them water-bugs that slides on a pond, they're spilin' for trouble, and submarines ain't nothin' to what them shoals kin do for 'em when they takes a notion.

"Didn't I tell ye, mates," he continued, addressing the whole group, "a blow was

comin'? I tol' them boys, too. The weather reports jus' aftertells what my feet has been a-howlin' fer three days. They're better than any barometer I ever seed blowed in glass, and, as I gets older, they gits accurater and accurater."

During the Cap'n's harangue the youngsters were busy, with open penknives, progging at the mouth of the monster.

"What's them boys tryin' to do?" Cap'n Buffum asked Turner. "Torment a critter after he's dead? That ain't no way to do."

"Want to get some teeth as souvenirs," explained Cat, looking up.

"I'll be bound you can't get 'em out that-a-way, sonny," asserted one of the fishermen, "Come along with me and we'll go up the house and get some pinchers and a jackknife."

Eagerly the boys jumped up and trotted along with the man, and in a short time were back with the implements and proceeded to extract a number of tusks from the grinning mouth. Some of these they counted on having mounted for scarf-pins; others would be distributed among their intimates.

First one and then another of the group around began "reminiscing."

"This is the first one I ever seen in these parts," declared one fisherman, "though somebody or the other tells me every summer they's spied one. Say, them varmints can chaw up a fish net same as a spider web."

"And they ain't squeamish about their mess, neither," quoth Cap'n Buffum. "In the tropics I heard tell of one that was landed and sliced, and in his belly they lit on a lady's workbox, with pins and needles and scissors and all them other jimcracks that women folks cuts up with."

The crowd applauded this as a genuine whopper.

"And I've seen 'em," said another traveled seaman, "thirty-seven feet long, and that's no sea yarn; and they could flip over a rowboat same as I could a splinter."

"Recollec' that sucker that turned up on the Jersey coast a summer or two ago and chawed up a kid in swimmin'?" said a third.

"When I was learnin' this hydroplane game on the Florida coast," related Turner, "one of my chums flopped in the sea, and by the time we

could row out to where he fell, there wasn't a strand of him left — not a sliver. But those folks down there don't seem to mind 'em. They go on in swimming regardless, and when an alarm's given, they hop on shore, and in fifteen minutes back they go again."

The shark chit-chat went on a half hour after the boys had laid in their supply of teeth. Then Turner, suddenly remembering his wireless, paid the fishermen the promised ten dollars, and insisted on an immediate return to Seagulls' Nest.

Cap'n Buffum accompanied the party as far as his lighthouse. "Wind's still gettin' chipper," remarked the old man as he parted with the others, "but I b'lieve that 'ere hurricane will butt up aginst Cape Hatteras and twis' out to sea. We won't get more'n the tail of it, but like the tail of one of them there sharks, a hurricane's tail kin lash up water considerable."

"Hope you are right about the turning," said Turner. "And don't forget to signal if you see the yacht."

Then Turner and the lads proceeded to their destination.

CHAPTER X

TREASURE TROVE

"Hang it! If we can't go in swimming I'm going out exploring the sand hills," proclaimed Cat after lunch. "What say, Jimmy?"

"Somebody else has got a say in that," interposed the prudent Turner. "I've got to stay here to look out for the wireless. Besides that shark skirmish gave me enough excitement for one day. And there's one thing, sure as shooting, I'm not going to let you youngsters go a-mooning over those treacherous sand hills by yourselves. First thing you know, you'd be buried with nothing but a leg sticking out to tell the tale."

"Great Gee!" snorted Cat. "Don't you reckon we can take care of ourselves. We're scouts."

"Scouts be scat! You're not going by yourselves. I don't care if you're Pathfinder and the whole Lewis and Clark expedition to boot."

The sight of Luke through the open door stimulated an idea in Jimmy's mind.

"Can't Luke go with us?" the boy begged.

Turner meditated a moment, reflected that he would like a few minutes to himself, interviewed the mahogany-hued cook, and settled it that the boys should have him as guide as soon as the dishes were washed.

A little later the three marched off, Jimmy provided with field glasses for scanning the ocean and Cat in possession of the house shovel.

"What's the idea of the shovel?" asked Jimmy. "Going to level off the sand hills?"

"Level the mischief!" retorted Cat. "Treasure, boy, treasure! Maybe my dream will come true."

"Great Golly, Cat, you talk like a ten cent whistle," Jimmy returned. "Why don't you put that back where you got it?"

"You grabbed the glasses, didn't you? Lemme carry what I darn please."

"Take the redhot kitchen range if you want to," consented Jimmy. "It's not my funeral, only I hate to see you act like a darn fool."

"This sho' is a lonesome place," Luke com-

mented in an injured tone. "It sho' will trick you if you stay here long enough. I'm gittin' kinder mollygrubby already. I ain't seen no ladies for a month and I jes' natchelly languishes for ladies' sassiety, and I'm goin' back to town befo' this summer's out, sho'."

With this introductory remark, the mulatto proceeded to enlighten the lads on his charms as a lady-killer, and, with this entertainment, they headed for the sand dunes that lay in a direction opposite to that of Cape Peril. The trampers had to keep their way high up on the beach, for the surf, riding before the heavy wind, broke tumultuously on the shore, and at times a mountainous breaker would collapse into a sweep of bubbling water that ranged afar and sent the three scampering to a higher place of refuge.

From time to time the lads would stop to examine some strange shells or stranded fish, and the imaginative Cat, especially, was on the alert for a mysterious box or bottle that might bring a message from the deep, as happens so often in the story books. Through the glasses, first one and then the other would gaze over the

face of the swelling waters, but nothing in the semblance of a yacht rewarded their search.

The three-mile walk covered, they reached the remarkable sand formations, the work of the winds, dunes to a height of thirty feet above the shore line. The boys climbed to the top of one of these hillocks, and, bracing themselves against the full sweep of the wind, gazed first inland upon sandswept groups of scrub pines, scraggy and wind-bitten, a scene stark in its desolation, and then, from their coign of vantage, turned their eyes upon the thrilling grandeur of the ocean in tumult.

While Jimmy was still looking at the sea, Cat's eager glance roved over the depression between their observatory and the next hill. It rested on a strange looking whitish spot in the valley and grabbing the glasses from his companion, he inspected the spot for a moment, handed them back, and without a word of explanation scrambled, shovel in hand, to the base of the sand dune.

"What's the matter with you, Cat?" yelled Jimmy. "Gone batty?"

Cat's only answer was a desperate fit of

shoveling at the white spot. Jimmy and his guide held their ground for a minute as they watched the operation. Then curiosity got the better of them and they slid down to the scene of Cat's activities. In evidence there was nothing more exciting than a heap of oyster shells, apparently recently laid bare by a sudden shifting of the sands.

"What sort of fool doings is this?" sneered Jimmy as he watched his imperturbable companion plying his shovel amid the crumbly shells. "These ain't anything but oyster shells."

"That's all right," Cat condescended to answer as he dug away. "You wait. What are oyster shells doing way up here?"

"Reckon somebody just had an oyster roast," surmised the short lad.

Luke had picked up some of the shells and was crumbling them between his powerful fingers.

"Them's oyster shells, all right," he announced. "I used to be a oyster opener, and I know these here ain't no new shells. Ain't no tellin' how old they is."

"See," exulted Cat, stopping his labor for a

moment. "That's what I thought. These oysters are about two hundred years old. Blackbeard may have put 'em here to cover up some treasure, and then he hid 'em with sand, and they've been covered up all this time till the wind blew it off lately. Here's where my dream comes true, see?"

And back he went to his digging.

"Quit wasting your time, and let's go on home," urged Jimmy.

But Cat, vigorously plying his implement and sending the sand and shells flying in every direction, was not to be moved. Jimmy and Luke resigned themselves to looking on idly.

Suddenly the worker's shovel struck something hard, and the excited delver reached down and drew forth, not a treasure chest, but a piece of broken pottery. This he cast aside with a look of disgust and proceeded with his digging. A few moments of work brought to view a rotten plank, and when this was raised there appeared, to the amazement of all, charred bones and bits of charcoal.

"Bones," announced Cat as he picked up one of the fragments with a puzzled look and vague

visions of ogres floating through his brain. "Babies. Must be the whole Blackbeard family."

Luke edged away superstitiously, or perhaps craftily, to avoid being called on to engage in unnecessary labor.

"Chicken bones," sniffed Jimmy contemptuously, as Cat dropped them and set to plugging away once more.

Suddenly the digger was on his knees, scraping with his hands in the moist sand and then sifting it through his fingers. A few moments later he was triumphantly holding up for Jimmy's inspection a small beadlike object. Then, under more scraping, several other pieces of broken pottery came to light, and finally, with a hatchet head of stone and several arrows, the revelation was complete. The Blackbeard theory had exploded.

"Oh, shucks," wailed Cat. "Nothing but the grave of some old Indian. I was looking for blunderbusses and coins and here I light on beads and arrows."

Luke's eyes popped, while Jimmy burst into a roar of laughter, so droll was the look of disap-

pointment on the face of the treasure seeker.

"I ain't goin' to stay here no longer," declared the mulatto, making ready to move off. "It's bad luck fooling 'round graves. No sir, I don't stay aroun' this place." And off he strode.

The boys lingered over their awesome find.

"Cheer up, Cat," encouraged Jimmy. "You've made a big find anyhow. I tell you what those little bones are. Don't you remember about reading that the Indians killed the warrior's dogs and buried them with him so they could be with him in the Happy Hunting Grounds? And when they ate dogs, they buried what was left, too."

"B'lieve I have," recalled Cat, still with a dismal look on his upturned face.

"Sure," proceeded Jimmy, "and they used to bury the chief sitting up and with him everything he owned, arrows, beads, wampum, tommyhawk and all his junk. They used to give dead people things instead of leaving things in their wills like we do now."

"Oh, ye-ah, I remember," Cat put in. "And they used to set a kettle of food on the grave

with three weeks' rations. That's what that pottery was for."

"Sure!"

Jimmy yawned and turned away.

"Well, where's the Indian?" Cat insisted. "'Spose he's down deeper?"

"After the three weeks' rations gave out he piked on to the Happy Hunting Grounds," jested Jimmy. "Now come on, let's get away from here or Luke will go bughouse."

"Well, I'm coming back and dig some more to-morrow," Cat declared, as he proceeded to gather up some of the relics and stuff them into his pockets.

This completed, the boys joined Luke, who was happily unconscious of the gruesome specimens Cat was carrying in his pocket. They made their way back to Seagulls' Nest by a road some distance from the ocean in order to avoid the high running surf.

Arriving at the house, they found Turner without news of the flyers, and then Cat proceeded to pour forth the story of his find, exhibiting his relics at the same time.

Turner listened with interest and inspected

the miscellaneous collection with no little amusement.

"Sorry to disappoint you, boys, but I don't think you are holding in your hands the remains of Powhatan or Sitting Bull or their squaws or papooses, but I do think you've struck what they call a shell heap, and you've got hold of some of the bones of the dogs and chickens and so forth they feasted on."

"Blame it then!" exclaimed Cat disgustedly, at the same time throwing the bones on the floor. "I wouldn't mind carrying a Big Chief around to show to all the girls, but blessed if I'm going to tote any chicken bones around."

"What'd I tell you?" said Jimmy. "Thought you knew more'n I did. Told you it warn't anything but dogs' bones."

"That's all right," encouraged Turner, "he's made a big discovery anyhow, and he'll get a write-up in the paper. This is what the reporters call a scoop. Wait till I show you something in an Indian book I've got upstairs."

Jimmy continued to joke Cat about his bone find till Turner appeared with a book.

"Listen here," he said opening the volume, and then he began to read: "'Many ancient sites have been discovered along the streams of tidewater Virginia, marking the positions of villages indicated by Capt. John Smith. In some localities, banks of oyster shells, intermingled with bits of pottery, implements of stone and bone, and fragments of bones of animals which had served as food, alone mark the position of some ancient settlement.' Now, as long as I've got the book," he continued, "I'll read you what the historian Strachey said about the Indian villages in these parts."

"'Their houses or towns are generally by the rivers, or not far from springs, and commonly built on a hill or rise of ground so that they may overlook the water and see everything that stirs on it. The houses are built far apart and there is no pretense of a street. All the houses, including the chief's house, are exactly alike. Round roofs are made of young twigs thatched with mats thrown over them. The walls are made of the bark of trees.

"'In the middle of the house, there is a smoke hole, through which the smoke from the

fire below can get out. Every house has two doors — one in front and one in the rear. The doors are never bolted, but simply hung with mats, which are raised or dropped at pleasure. The houses are usually built under great trees to protect them from the winter winds and the summer sun. They have no windows. All the light comes through the doors or the smoke vent. The Indians eat, sleep and cook all in one room.

" ' Their beds are made of short posts driven in the ground around the sides of the wigwam, a foot high, with poles laid along and reeds cast across them. They sleep on a mat which they roll up on arising.

" ' In March and April, they net fish and hunt turkeys and squirrels, and in May they plant out their corn. In the hunting season, they leave their houses, gather together in companies, and with their families, go to the most deserted places up near the mountains where there is plenty of game. The huts in which they live during this hunting season are flimsy cabins, with mats thrown over them. These mats the squaws carry when a move is made. They like-

wise carry the corn, acorns, mortars, and all the bag and baggage.'

"Now to prove to you they ate dogs, listen to what Henry Hudson said about the Algonquin Indians on the Hudson:

"'I sailed to the shore in one of their canoes with an old man, who was chief of a tribe consisting of forty men and seventeen women; these I saw there in a house well constructed of oak-bark, and circular in shape, so that it had the appearance of being built with an arched roof. It contained a great quantity of maize, or Indian corn, and beans of last year's growth, and there lay near the house for the purpose of drying, enough to load three ships, besides what was growing in the fields. On our coming into the house, two mats were spread out to sit upon, and immediately some food was served in well made wooden bowls: two men were also dispatched at once with bows and arrows in quest of game. Soon after they brought in a pair of pigeons which they had shot. They likewise killed a fat dog, and skinned it in great haste with shells which they had got out of the water.'

"There's your dog feast," said Turner, "and

it's all a matter of taste. If you'd been brought up on them or rats or what not you smack your lips over 'em."

"I'll take the what not," declared Cat, "but excuse me from Chink's grub."

"You know," said Turner with a smile, "the Chinese used to think that pig wasn't fit to eat till a young Chink fingering around in the ashes of a burnt-down house stuck his thumb in the cremated family pig and then stuck it in his mouth to cool and got the taste. And, when he spread around the news of what a dainty it was, every Chinaman in the neighborhood burnt down his house with the pig in it so as to pleasure himself with that wonderful taste. They'd been doing that for a thousand years before they discovered you could roast a pig without burning a house down."

"Where'd you get that from?" inquired Jimmy.

"That's from *Lamb on Roast Pig.*"

"*Lamb on Roast Pig!*" laughed Cat. "What are you giving us?"

"I mean," drawled Turner, "a fellow named Charles Lamb wrote the dope."

"Must have had some dope to write that fool stuff," surmised Jimmy.

Cat booed.

"That'll do," commanded Turner. "Now chase yourselves out with that truck, and let me work."

CHAPTER XI

HOW THE AIRBUG STARTED

After the boys had unloaded their minds of the Indian discovery and reviewed the shark episode half a dozen times or more, they began to grow restless. A vague apprehension about the fate of Hardy and Legs took possession of them, while the dismally howling wind furnished an unpleasant accompaniment to their thoughts. Cat beat a tattoo on the window-panes and gazed out moodily at the curling whitecaps. Jimmy sought Luke's company in the kitchen, but the mulatto with a sulky scowl emitted nothing but grunts, so the lad hunted up Turner.

"No news from Kitty Hawk yet," announced the latter, adding such encouragement as he was able to conjure up.

After joining Cat once more in his gloomy occupation of staring at the high running surf and scurrying clouds, Jimmy suggested killing time by a nap. If there ever were a time when

it was profitable to be dead to the world, this seemed the occasion; so upstairs bounded the two, after getting Turner's promise to wake them in case anything exciting turned up.

At six, they were down again, hurrying out to watch the mighty upheaval of the ocean. Breasting the wind, they scurried along the low sand hills above the beach. Now that the tide was approaching its maximum, the foaming breakers beat the shore with redoubled fury. The low stretch between Cape Peril and Seagulls' Nest was completely submerged, and the waves were washing over into Lake Herring. The spillway appeared in danger of demolition.

Excitement grew when the watchers saw in the far distance a big liner upreared on the summit of a great wave, only to disappear the next moment in the trough, and then mount into sight once more on another swell.

When the wind drove the boys indoors once more, they found dinner waiting to furnish a half-hour's diversion. The evening dragged by without news of yacht or flyers. By nine o'clock darkness had shrouded the ocean except where sections gleamed under the shafts of light that

poured forth from the lighthouse of Cape Peril.

"Buffum's on the job," declared the Tarheel.

About eleven, the three watchers noted a perceptible lull in the blast and, amid the scudding clouds, stars peeped out here and there. The barometer was rising, as Turner noted.

"The storm must have turned tail at Hatteras as Buffum predicted," was his opinion, "and the worst is over. I was afraid we'd have one of those August blows that come once in a generation and lift a few house lids and rearrange the forestry, but it seems that's given us the go-by. How about bed?"

As it was evident that the speaker had no intention of turning in himself, the lads, fortified by their nap, firmly declined. They meant to see the thing out. Turner allowed himself to be persuaded. With blinds tight shut and a bright light burning, the room was filled with talk of Indians for half an hour longer. Then, aircraft bobbed up. After an hour and more of war-aeronautic talk, the Tarheel woke up to the very evident fact that, although the breakers kept up their uninterrupted boom against the beach, the main fury of the wind was well

over, leaving in its wake a chain of rapidly succeeding flaws.

"Look here, boys," insisted the man, after his weather wisdom was sufficiently satisfied, "all danger of our doing the Noah's ark stunt is over. Hardy and Company are snug in bed and the yacht's in port. Off to bed with you."

"Say, just one more thing," pleaded Jimmy. "Before we go, tell us how people first got hold of the flying idea. Come across."

"Well, of all the—" yawned Turner and then conceded. "All right. I'll give you about ten minutes' dope on that, and then I'm sealed and soldered. Get me?"

Jimmy and Cat got him.

"As to the flying idea," proceeded the host, "I reckon dreams started it. There's no dream more common than the one in which you think you are flying or gliding through the air, and it's a pretty keen sensation."

Cat and Jimmy hastened to recount some of their own experiences in this line, but Turner, mindful of his time limit, was quick to cut them off.

"Then, when folks got to thinking about fly-

ing," he proceeded, "their idea was to get up to heaven without dying and turning to angels. The earliest nations in history have traditions and legends along this line. Of all the fancies, the imagination of the Indians took the cake. I mean the inhabitants of India, not the American Indians, misnamed by the first explorers under the impression their ships had struck the other side of the globe.

"One funny yarn was about a Brahmin, one of the Hindoo priests, who spied the god Indra's Wishing Cow wandering about on a meadow. The idea occurred to him that if he'd freeze tight to the cow's tail he'd get a lift up to their heaven on the top of the Himalayan mountains. So sure 'nuf, when the kindly cow had laid in her stock of hay and was ready to frisk back to heaven, the Brahmin, with a stranglehold on her tail, got in too, and saw the whole menagerie free. The next day, when the cow took a notion to slide down to earth again, she carried the passenger in the Pullman tail-car, and landed him safely on his native heath.

"Very proud of his feat, he told the neighbors and got the whole gang worked up for

the same picnic, so he concocted a plan. 'Pals,' he said, 'I tell you how we'll all get a finger in the pie. I'll hang on to the cow's tail, and one of you can stretch out and clamp on to my feet, and the next one on to his feet, and the next on to *his*, and so down the line, and we'll all get a lift like the tail of a kite.' Well, that's what they did — I mean so far as the start was concerned. The Wishing Cow made her spring-off and carried a string of about twelve husky Brahmins hanging on to her elevator. But, en route, one of the lower Brahmins, craving some conversation, called out to the tail-holder, 'How tall did you say the god Indra's crown was?' And the top chump, who must have been a little soft in the attic, answered, 'Bout this tall,' and let loose the cow's tail so as to spread his hands and show the height of the crown. Very naturally, the whole train of passengers came down a-kiting on their last journey, hit the soil, and got pancaked."

This tale made something of a hit.

"The Greek and Roman mythologies," continued the entertainer, "are chock-full of yarns about flying gods and air-prowling beasts. The

winged horse Pegasus had a steady job furnishing air rides to bucks who knew how to handle him. But a fellow named Bellerophon tried to get up to Olympus, the Greek heaven, on him; whereupon Jupiter sent a gadfly to pester the beast till he gave the ambitious rider a tumble. Used to be a ship in the English navy, by the way, called *The Bellerophon,* which the sailorboys proceeded to twist into *The Bully Ruffian.*

"Then, there was the god Mercury, who used to plane through the atmosphere with winged sandals and a feathered cap, carrying aerograms for his daddy, Jupiter. When he was off duty one day he invented the lyre — not the kind you are thinking of, but the l-y-r-e — the ancestor of the jews'-harp that we boys call the juice-harp."

"That's where quicksilver gets its name 'mercury,' after him, isn't it?" asked Jimmy.

"That's right, Solomon. Now we'll get down to the first account of a man trying to fly, in the Greek fables. It seems a chap named Daedalus broke out of a tower in which he'd been jugged by King Minos, but the tower was

on an island, and the question was how to get away from the island without a boat. Then the bird idea struck him, so he got busy making wings for himself and his son Icarus. He tacked big feathers together with thread and stuck the little ones on with wax till the whole contraption had the curve of a bird's wing. His son, Ikey, seems to have been a mischievous little monkey who kept blowing the feathers around and meddling with the wax, and I suppose that's the reason he got what was coming to him later, as happens to all the sprightly kids in the pious story books.

" Well, when the old man had finished off his two pair of wings he hoisted his up and gave 'em a wave and found he could get a lift as easy as falling off a log. Then, he proceeded to put young Ikey wise. ' Now, Ike,' says he, ' no tail-spins or nose-dives, or loop-the-loops, but just straight business, and don't you fly too low or the damp sea air will take all the curl out of those Marcelle wave feathers, and, on the other hand, don't you get to rocketing too high or the sun will melt the wax.' In those benighted days, folks thought the sun was just a couple

o' flights upstairs, and the higher you got, the hotter, which don't seem like such a fool conclusion after all.

"Well, to go back to our muttonhead, Ikey — what should he do but get to feeling his oats and forget all the advice his dad gave him? He started right off to skylarking; the wax melted and down flopped Ikey into the sea. No sharks in those waters, it seems, for the old man planed down, fished out all that was left of Ikey's ambitions and buried it, and then went on his way and made an eggshell landing in Sicily.

"It's the same old story with flyers learning these days. Most of the smash-ups in the early part of the war were caused by young smart Alecks thinking they knew it all on the first jump-off. Take that in and think it over good and hard. Even after you graduate at college, you have hardly begun your education."

"What's the use of starting, then?" demanded Cat.

Turner glanced sharply at the boy.

"Because if you don't and, unless you keep on plugging, you'll degenerate into a big,

flabby, wop of a numskull. That what you're aiming for?"

"Naw," conceded Cat, "not all that."

"Well! Come back to common sense and stay there.

"Now to come down to modern times, there was a monk in Spain along about the fourteenth century who is said to have jumped from a tower with a parachute sort of contrivance and flown some distance. Then, in the seventeenth century, there was a locksmith who made a flying device. He began by jumping out of the first story window, like a disappointed lover I heard of once who tried to commit suicide that way."

"Ha! ha!" said Cat. "Some bold inventor he was. 'S'pose he jumped into a net, too."

"But, my dear Catboy, don't you know you can't put your foot on the top round of the ladder first thing? Every invention has been worked to a finish by a chain of people feeling their way in that direction, in some cases through hundreds of years. Every big bug you hear of in any line of invention is standing on the top of the brains of folks you don't see, some of them as dead as Caesar thousands of years.

"Well, anyway, the locksmith kept a-going till he tried the second story and then the third, and finally he was able to fly over houses and rivers, so they say. I wasn't there. So other people, on down through the centuries, kept juggling their brains, and projecting and projecting. At last, somebody in France invented the 'aeronautical fish' that attracted a lot of attention. This was a sort of balloon, shaped like a fish, and was propelled with wings, or fins, worked by cranks — not human ones. But the trouble with even the best of these devices was that they could operate only when the air was absolutely still, so of course they were of no practical service. It was evident, too, to more sensible men that the fish idea was off, so far as the air was concerned, but, if anything serviceable was to come, the machine would have to be modeled after a bird, which is going back to the Greeks, after all.

"Even the balloon idea doesn't go so far back," proceeded Turner. "It depended on the discovery of hydrogen gas about a hundred and fifty years ago. Then somebody thought of filling hogs' bladders and paper-bags with this

stuff, to see if they would work. But neither did. The only thing they could raise with it was a soap-bubble. After a while two brothers named Montgolfier, paper-makers in France, hit on the idea of generating a gas from slightly-moistened straw and wool set to burning; and found that this gas would raise a silk bag when allowed to enter an opening in its bottom. The truth was, though, it wasn't a gas that did it, but just the hot air.

"Satisfied they could turn the trick, the brothers staged a free show and set Paris frog-eyed. After some improvements to the body of the balloon, the inventors attached a wicker-basket and, after some persuasion, induced a sheep, a rooster, and a duck to take a trip. This congenial trio rose aloft and then came down once more in safety."

"Bah-bah! Quack-quack! Cockadoodle-do!" Cat horseplayed.

"Dunno what sort of language they used," laughed the Tarheel, "but I hope it wasn't that rotten. Anyhow, when I studied French, I was surprised to find that French roosters don't talk like ours, but say 'Co-co-ri-co!—at

least that's what the book gave. But when I got over on the other side, during the war, I couldn't tell a bit of difference between their barnyard clatter and the fowl conversation we hear this side.

"Well, to get back to the airships — from that time, everybody went balloon crazy. All sorts of improvements were made in the machine. The silk was varnished, the bag was covered with a net, and the apparatus was furnished with a valve, barometer and sand-ballast. Instead of the old dangerous way of filling them with hot air from a fire, hydrogen or coal gas was used. Then the parachute game began, with more than one broken neck and pancake landing, as we used to call a plane smash-up in France.

"Then, before the end of the eighteenth century, balloons began to be used in war to observe the enemy, same thing our sausage affairs are used for now. In addition to this, they were used by scientists to sample the upper atmosphere. One fellow got as high as 23,000 feet — over four miles. Our country too, has had fans do all sorts of daredevil stunts with balloons, flying from coast to coast and what not. Pretty

lively fun till the airplane made it look just about as lively as croquet."

"I've been up in one," announced Cat, proudly, "because the old man bought some liberty bonds during the war and he let me have the lift in one of those army baskets he was entitled to for buying them."

"You've been up in pretty much everything," laughed Turner. "It's about time you were going down in a coal shaft to see what the other direction looks like. But you haven't been up to the moon yet, like Hans Phaal in that balloon trip that wild-eyed Edgar Allan Poe wrote about. Bunk, but pretty entertaining bunk. Then, too, he wrote a hoax about a balloon crossing the Atlantic that took in a lot of suckers when it came out in the New York Sun. He was quite a bird at slinging fake scientific bunco."

"Quoth the Raven, 'Nevermore,'" put in Jimmy, rejoicing in his acquaintance with the author.

"'Nevermore' is right," assented Turner, "and this raven here is going to his downy, and you've got to, too, if I have to drum your

hides to make you. Now for one more look at the sea."

As Jimmy and Cat stopped behind a moment to argue the question as to whether they would allow themselves to be driven to bed at the early hour of two, Turner sauntered to the door, opened it to a gust that sent papers whirling about the room, bounded out, and slammed it behind him. An instant later, there was a sharp exclamation. Both lads started up, rushed to the door under the impression that some wreck was battering on the coast, and, as the room light fell upon Turner's form the two could distinguish his hand pointing in the direction of the spectral lighthouse.

"Look, boys, look," he yelled. "The Cape Peril light is out."

CHAPTER XII

THE CAPE PERIL LIGHT IS OUT

"Look, look," he had cried as the two scouts stood aghast. "The Cape Peril light is out!"

The lads' hearts almost stopped beating as they stared wildly into the gloom at the dark curtain of the horizon against which, by the faint glow of the few stars peeping through the clouds, the lighthouse was faintly outlined in shadow. The din and hullabaloo of wind and waves, struggling like two fiends, heightened the horror of the mystery.

"He's — he's dead!" stuttered out Cat, with an exclamation, as Cap'n Buffum's prediction flashed on his mind.

Turner appeared to give no heed to his words.

"And look, look there!" The man thrust a finger out towards the sea.

In the distance a rocket was showering the sky with a cluster of bursting stars. Then, the pall of darkness settled once more.

"Good — night!" shrilled Jimmy, trembling with anxiety. "What — what's *that* mean?"

"A ship in distress — on the shoals, maybe — that's what it means."

"It's the yacht," gasped Cat all in a breath. "I bet it's the yacht."

"Can't be! Watch! Look there! Look there! Look!"

Another fiery cluster burst and fell.

With an agitated countenance and quickly beating heart, Turner stood for a moment or two longer staring into the gloom, his wits working violently.

The brief pause seemed an eternity to the boys.

"We can't walk and we can't swim, that's sure," muttered the man. "Buffum must have been taken sick. No, that's off. The light was going — and would have kept on — Great heaven!" he thought aloud. "Of all the cold-blooded villainy! Some devil's put it out!"

Turner halted and frowned.

He paced up and down a couple of minutes longer. Then, evidently a plan had suggested itself to his mind, for he turned short around and started for the door.

"What you going to do?" Cat called after him.

"Show you later," flashed the reply. "One of you go and haul Luke out. You go, Jimmy. You follow me, Miller."

So saying, Turner dashed into the house, took time to snatch up an electric flash-light, then rushed through the kitchen to a rear shed, leaving Jimmy the job of resurrecting Luke, asleep in his shoes and half his clothes, on a cot in the closet-room adjoining the kitchen.

Reaching the shed Turner seized a great can of kerosene.

"Is that oil?" asked the mystified Miller, who had made the best use of his legs to keep on his leader's heels.

"Yes, kerosene."

"What's that for? Not going to set the house afire?" was the boy's excited query.

"Don't ask fool questions," snapped the other. "Stop talking and work. Grab up that tow — there — there in the corner, cram it in that basket — that one — and come on. Here, stick this axe on top when you're done."

Turner held the light impatiently while Cat,

his mind in a whirl, pressed in as much tow as the basket would hold and then thrust the axe under the receptacle's handle.

"Now, come on!"

As Turner passed the closet, he reinforced Jimmy's desperate efforts to bring the mulatto to full consciousness. Finally, the cook came forth, rolling his eyes about in his coffee-colored face. At sight of the oil can, he faltered and fell into a state of agitation, looking for all the world like a fish out of the water, gasping for breath. Clearly his suspicions ran along with those Cat had expressed.

"Lighthouse light out. Going to set a shack up the beach on fire," blurted Turner to relieve the suspense. "Here, take that basket." He pointed to a huge one in the pantry. "And you and Jimmy pile in it every magazine and newspaper in sight; then clamp the lid on, and make the best time you know how up to that old Thompson cottage. You understand? Lightning quick. And lock the door after you when you come out."

Luke, now completely awake and consoled by the news that the roof was not to be burned over

his head, grabbed up the basket, hurried into the living room, and assisted Jimmy in creating a small hurricane as the two bustled and scrambled about, harvesting the papers.

"Now — double quick!" was Turner's order to Miller.

Man and boy hurried out into the wind and darkness, and, guided by the rays of the flashlight, made for the trail back of the sandhills. The stiff wind behind them aided their speed as they struck into the path, and it took but a short time to reach the ramshackle cottage. Windowless and doorless it stood, a flimsy skeleton. How it had so long resisted being swept away entirely seemed little short of a miracle.

At the entrance, Turner set down his burden, and, seizing the axe, set to work slashing at the decaying weather-boarding that splintered like tinder under his efforts. By the time Luke and Jimmy arrived panting, a considerable pile of kindling had accumulated.

In a few minutes more paper, tow and wood heaped near the central partition was saturated with the contents of the can, and, on the application of a match, burst into sputtering and crack-

ling flames. Fanned by the full sweep of the wind, the blaze soon had the partition wall in its embrace.

"Burn, for heaven's sake, burn quick!" Turner exhorted the fire.

Before many moments had passed, his eager wish was gratified. The flames rose high above the smoke, licking up the dry, mouldering wood. It was merely the question of a short time before the whole building would be in flames — one huge, roaring bonfire.

"Now," shouted Turner, his duty here discharged. "That'll help a little while and may save a ship. Here, let's beat it."

He had already moved off, and, with his back to the blaze, was scanning the ocean eagerly. Seeing nothing, he started off at a trot, axe in one hand and flash-light in the other. The boys and Luke tried to keep pace, the mulatto in a state of superstitious tremor at the whole proceedings.

"This come o' them boys diggin' up them bones befo' their time," was his conclusion.

At a high point of the way, Turner halted for a moment and gazed seaward.

"Thank heaven!" he exclaimed, seizing Miller's arm and directing his attention to a quick succession of rockets. "That means they've seen the light and got their bearings. Thank God!"

A little later the same signal appeared once more.

"See! see!" Turner shouted against the wind. "No mistake. It's all right. Now they can haul off and keep from being pounded to pieces. We've saved 'em. Thank God!"

"Going to Cape Peril?" asked Cat, as they jogged on again.

"Straight as I can make it," was the answer. "If I have to fight a whirlwind to get there."

"Don't you s'pose some of the fishermen have gone over?" suggested Jimmy, hopefully.

"Not counting on anything. More than likely they're all sound asleep and haven't seen a thing. I'm not taking any chances. Something's happened to Buffum and my business is to see what it is."

Until the party reached Seagulls' Nest nothing more was said, for, with heads down and running against the blast, talking was difficult.

"Now," said Turner with decision, as they reached the house. "I'm going to cross Herring in the seaplane, and I want one fellow to help me. Jimmy's the smallest and the speediest and I'm not going to get in any danger — if I can help it."

"Going to let me go?" said Jimmy with ready eagerness. "*Me?*"

"Why not me, too?" demanded Cat almost angrily.

"No time for arguing," snapped Turner as he hurried about providing himself with some necessary articles, Cat pleading at his heels. "You and Luke stay tight in this house. There may be crooks around. When you see a light in the Cape Peril lighthouse window, then you'll know we're there and all's O. K."

A few minutes later, Turner and Jimmy, equipped for their hazardous expedition, had dashed from the house, leaving Cat disconsolate and Luke only too delighted to be able to return once more in peace to his slumbers.

CHAPTER XIII

RESCUE THROUGH THE STORM

Jimmy, keyed to the highest tension by this sudden plunge into a perilous adventure, followed close on Turner's heels, axe a-shoulder, down to Lake Herring. While the lake presented a peaceful scene in comparison with the billowy ocean, its wind-lashed surface could scarcely be likened to a millpond.

"I wonder where in the mischief the rowboat is?" Turner took time to ask as he shot his light about the shore near the hangar bridge.

"What rowboat? Were you going in a rowboat?" Jimmy returned with some uneasiness.

"No time for that, boy, when the hydro can do the business. Remember we had a rowboat chained here — the one that belonged to the house?"

Jimmy recalled the fact instantly.

"Maybe the wind tore it off?" he suggested.

"Maybe it did, but it's powerful funny, for there's the chain hanging to the post."

There was no time for further speculation. The two made their way along the foot bridge, moving with great caution to keep from being swept over. The hydro shed seemed intact, and within, the pilot, examining every section of his machine, found she had ridden the swelling waters without damage. In a few minutes, he had her ready for action.

Once Jimmy had interrupted the work by declaring he had heard a sound of oars in the distance. Turner, pricking up his ears, noticed nothing but wind and splashing water.

"Wind, my boy, can make you think you hear almost anything on a dark night. Get in here and forget your nerves," was all the satisfaction he gave the detective.

Silently, Jimmy climbed aboard.

The lad in place, the pilot started his motor. Swiftly the boat glided out into the night. Guided partly by his instruments and partly by instinct acquired by long experience, Turner headed her boldly due south, let her skim the waters for a space, then took a flying leap of something over half a mile, and before Jimmy had time to take full stock of the flying sensa-

tion, he felt the spray on his face and knew that the boat was once again cleaving the water.

"Now," shouted the pilot. "Nearly there! Now for a place to anchor."

Swift maneuvering brought the ship athwart the shore-line, vaguely visible in the gloom.

Jimmy was almost too excited by the experience just past to think of any perils ahead. A journey — even such a brief one — in a flying ship by night would have thrilled any youngster.

"Now," directed Turner when the anchor was cast and the boat tipped the sand. "Out, quick as you can make it. Hold tight to the axe. Don't drop that, for heaven's sake!"

"Reckon any crook will smash the ship while we're gone?" the boy asked as they ploughed through the sand.

"I'm not reckoning anything. You follow me."

The two made their way stealthily from the lake through the sand path up to the mound, pausing from time to time to listen for suspicious noises amid the howling of the tempest. Before them in the gloom the lighthouse loomed like a weird and gigantic phantom. Jimmy, fighting

off any rising nervousness, felt his heart pounding against his ribs as he followed his resolute guide up the slope. On the summit of the sand-hill, Turner paused again to reconnoiter, his pistol ready for action. Then he pushed on to the door. He tried to open it but it refused to budge. His first impulse was to yell for Buffum. His next to go for the fishermen. He dismissed both thoughts. He no longer hesitated what he should do.

"Here, the axe," he whispered to Jimmy, as he thrust his pistol into its holster. "Stand away while I smash the door in and stay there till I call you."

Under a few pounding blows, the door yielded and crashed open.

"Be careful," he whispered once more in Jimmy's ear as he made ready to enter. "Stay where you are till I whistle, you understand; then come in."

Leaping ahead, Turner dropped his axe within the doorway and flashed his light, his right hand holding the pistol with perfect steadiness. A glance assured him that the brick paved, circular room, bare as a vault, was free of lurkers.

Then he softly called up the stair, "Cap'n Buffum!"

With tense ears he listened. A slight noise, the mere ghost of a scraping sound, attracted his notice. Again he called. This time the same scraping, scratching sound followed, a shade more distinct.

Casting aside all thought of danger to himself, Turner thrust his flash-light into his pocket and, revolver advanced, began to grope his way up the pitch-black stair, stealthily as an Indian, fully aware that he might receive a bullet at any moment. Up, up he crept until his left hand felt the floor of the upper room. Then he listened for a brief moment. Again, the scratching sound, louder and more insistent. His keen ear had located its direction to the inch. He bounded up the last steps, and snatching out his flash-light, held it at arm's length shooting its ray straight at the noise, his pistol ready for instant action. There, revealed by the ray, was a form bound hand and foot, roped to the great chair, and with eyes bandaged and a gag in the mouth. It was Cap'n Buffum.

By a desperate effort, the captive had managed

to strain and stir his chair a few inches and thus create the mysterious sound that the Tarheel had heard.

"This is Turner," called out the rescuer in a low tone, "Is the man who did this upstairs?" he took time to ask as he advanced.

The head shook a feeble negative.

Flashing his light, Turner's first act was to survey every nook and corner of the room, moving with swift steps. Then he rushed to the head of the stairway, gave a shrill whistle, and lighted the way for the plucky Jimmy as the lad bounded up the stairs.

"Hold the light," he commanded. "It's Cap'n Buffum knotted up. Here — here."

The lad took in the situation at a glance.

Instantly the man set nimbly to work to release the captive. He snatched the handkerchief from the eyes that stared out in a mute and pathetic gratitude. Then he succeeded in extracting the gag.

"The light! My light! Bill Perkins!" were the words that came feebly from the throat. Then the eyes closed; the lips and face blanched; the old man had fainted.

Without a word, Turner worked like a demon with his knife to sever the cords that cut into the wrists and ankles and those that bound the prisoner to the chair.

"Some sailor did this," he muttered as he slashed the hemp. Freed of his bonds, Cap'n Buffum revived for the moment, passed his hand over his brow, and started up; but his feeble knees gave way and he would have sagged to the floor if Turner and Jimmy had not supported him.

"Get him to the bed," commanded Turner.

A moment later the limp burden was stretched out on the cot, and the Tarheel had located and was lighting the lamp.

"Quick, water," he cried to Jimmy, at the same time pointing to the washstand. Jimmy, seizing the pitcher, began to lave the wan face, while Turner, snatching a flask of stimulant from the cupboard, forced a liberal dose down the old man's throat.

In a few moments the closed eyelids opened. "Where am I?" he asked, light-headedly.

"You're all right. Just a little faint," encouraged Turner, leaning over him. "It's Turner

and one of the boys with you. Easy, now!"

The old man's fingers began to pluck nervously at the buttons of his coat. "My light! My light!" he whispered as recollection dawned on him once more.

"Listen," Turner said earnestly. "Don't worry. I've set fire to a shack on the shore — you know Thompson's old cottage — so there's no danger to ships. Cheer up now, and tell us how it happened when you feel a little stronger."

The words had their effect.

"You done that? You throwed out the life-belt. Lemme see it, mate."

To humor him, Turner lifted him so he could see the glow through the window.

"You done it, mate, and to think my light ain't never been out befo'. 'Twar that scum Bill Perkins that tied me and smashed my light, and —"

What the Cap'n was about to add was interrupted by sounds without. Turner rushed to the window and was able to distinguish a group of men, with lanterns swinging in the wind, a party from the fishing settlement. There was a rush for the stairs and the men thronged into

the room. Anxious questions and a babble of speculations filled the air; it was some minutes before the crowd could be sufficiently calmed to listen to Buffum's story.

"My heart near cracked them two hours I war tied up a-thinking about my light bein' out," he moaned. "That thar fire won't last till day." he added with a sudden attack of dismay.

"Listen here, Cap'n," put in one of the fishermen, "soon as you tell us yo' tale I'll go up and fire a shanty near the settlement. That'll keep goin' till daybreak that ain't far off. Tomorrow a lightship will come down. Tain't no use to worry."

The words seemed to put more life into the old man, and he launched off on his story.

CHAPTER XIV

CAP'N BUFFUM'S REVELATIONS

"'Twar Bill Perkins what done it!"

"Bill Perkins!" echoed several of the group gruffly. "Who is he? We'll get him!"

"You recollec' the party I tol' you I fit the duel with thirty year ago?" asked the Cap'n, looking at Turner. "And I tol' them boys about it, too," he added, nodding at Jimmy.

"You saw the man, then, and know him?" Turner demanded excitedly.

"No, I ain't seen him this time, but I know 'twar Bill Perkins."

One fisherman put his hand to his forehead and made a wheellike movement, giving, at the same time, a knowing glance at a neighbor.

"That's that 'ar stuff he took that's talkin' — that ain't him," was his inference.

"He didn't tie hisself up, that's sho'," replied the other, picking up a piece of the rope.

The thought of Perkins had choked the utterance of the Cap'n for a moment. Then he went

on, "Yes, 'twar him we saw on the beach yestiddy."

"That stranger — the one in the oilskins?" asked Turner, starting, while a stir occurred among the fishermen.

"It war him," insisted the old man promptly.

"I suspicioned that man o' some devilment soon as I seen him prowlin' around," declared one fisherman.

"But we'll get him as soon as day come on," said another hotly, "and when we ketch him!" He added a significant gesture.

"Now, Cap'n Buffum," encouraged Turner, "tell us how it all happened, in order. Stop if you feel excited. Take your time."

"'Twar this way," began the old man, catching his breath, and talking in panting phrases. "After I eat my supper and dark war comin' on, I goes up to start the light, and seen everything was shipshape and cosy, fer I knowed if thar ever war a night when a light war needed, this war the time. Then I come down and set a while. Then, thinks I to myself, I'll go ashore and limber up my legs and take a look at that nasty sea good and close, and down I walks. I

own it, mates, I ain't locked the do' after me, sence it never come in my head no critter would sneak in to do no mischief. Off I goes and stays down thar a-watchin' that grumpy sea and a-lookin' fer twenty minutes, it might be, and then I turns in agin, and locks the do' and goes up fer another mindin' of my light."

"Sure you didn't see anybody suspicious hanging around outside?" Turner put in.

"Nary a soul has I seen except that Hank Thomas thar over by the settlement, and I ain't considerin' him suspicious."

Hank, present, becoming the center of interest, turned very red and began to mutter. His companions' glances, however, were cast in jest rather than in earnest.

"I went up to mind the light," proceeded Buffum, "and then I come down and set by my lamp, and my rheumatism bein' worse fer walkin' on my legs, I took some painkiller to ease 'em."

At this several fishermen winked at one another.

"And then I did a thing I ain't never recollec' doin' befo'. I dozes off in my chair."

Despite the suspense, this innocent statement aroused a general grin, for nearly every person present, at one time or another, had found the lighthouse keeper fast asleep in his accustomed seat.

"I must have been nappin' fifteen minutes—" he went on.

"Say, Cap'n, how long you think your light's been out?" interrupted a fisherman.

"Sumpin' like two hours as fer as I kin calkerlate, mates, sence I war tied up and heard that scum smash the light."

"Right after dark you fell off?" persisted the questioner.

"Right after dark it war."

"What happened those other two or three hours?" Turner took up the quizzing.

"Maybe it war more'n fifteen minutes I war' sleep. Maybe it war." conceded the Cap'n, "or maybe it war more'n two hours sense the devil lit on me."

Turner and the others, raising no further objection to the misfit in time, allowed the old man to go on.

"As I war sayin', after I had been 'sleep

fifteen minutes, or maybe mo', I waked a-sudden, feelin' a rope coilin' roun' and roun' me same as a sarpint; and, befo' I could bat a lid, mates, I war lashed tight in that thar chair. I never knowed such quick work as that varmint done. I yells, but it ain't done no good; and what I let out I ain't got no way o' knowin', fer thar is times when a man's words ain't come from his senses."

"And you didn't see the man?" Turner asked quietly.

"I couldn't, mates. He war behind me, and I war tied stiff as a corpse befo' I knowed it, and one twis' o' that thar rope war roun' my neck."

"And you claim it was a man you knew as Bill Perkins?"

"Bill Perkins it war that I hadn't seen befo' fer thirty year."

"And you didn't see him this time?" insisted Turner.

"Let the Cap'n talk," growled a longshoreman. "You can't tell a yarn straight when you're pestered by a felluh tryin' to twis' sumpin' out o' you like a pesky lawyer."

Turner flushed, but kept out of a dispute.

"When I war tied that-a-way," went on the old man, "I knowed it war a sailor that turned the trick, that's what I knowed fust."

Turner nodded in approval of his own suspicions along this line.

"I tried to turn my head, but, quick as lightning, a hand slip roun' my bandanna handkerchief, and though I jerk my derndest he got it over my eyes; but, mates, befo' he done that thing, I seed a fist on my larboard side, and 'twar his'n. I'd a knowed that claw if I'd a seen it hangin' on a monkey-tree in Africky. 'Twar Bill Perkins's."

At the harrowing thought, the Cap'n paused to recover from his emotion, and demanded another draft of his medicine.

"Bill Perkins," he continued, apparently refreshed, "had two claws on his left handle. They warn't no longer than the first joint; his fingers warn't never cut off; he come into the world that way, fer them stumps had a nail growin' on the end o' each of 'em. 'Twar Bill Perkins's left I seen. One second I seen it, but in that second I knowed. And I felt a burnin'

feel I ain't never felt so powerful since that 'ar duel. But I ain't tried to call his name fer, if he'd a knowed 'twar me, he'd a killed me cold-blooded on the spot — that ornery critter would 'a done it."

"Look here, Cap'n," put in the doubting Turner once more. "Why couldn't somebody else have had a hand like that?"

"Nobody but the Old Scratch. Blister my boots, thar ain't no other hand like it created."

To humor the old man, Turner did not insist on this doubt, but nevertheless put another query, "If this was *your* Bill Perkins —"

"He ain't no Bill Perkins o' *mine!*" exploded the Cap'n.

"I mean," corrected Turner, smiling. "If this was Bill Perkins, why hasn't he found out you were the Buffum he knew, while he's been prowling around here?"

"He never would 'a knowed no Buffum," explained the old man, "because, when I fust shipped to sea, I warn't Bill Buffum no longer. To make my old daddy easy I called myself out o' my name. I war Jim Happer to all who knowed me aboard ship. That war the name

Perkins heard me called the month he war on ship with me."

"I see," said the questioner, apparently satisfied with the explanation.

"I warn't tellin' him who I war after I seen that hand, but I war spittin' and sputterin' good and hearty when he stuck that thar dirty rag in my mouth till he cut off my holluh instantaneous. I ain't seen nor speak nothin' mo', but I hed my feelin' lef', mates, and my hearin' were thar. He twist my wrist and my legs till the cut hurt so hard I ain't felt the rheumatism on account of that other misery killin' it off by bein' so mighty. He lashed me up, mates, and then my heart turn turtle and crack and my stummick raise a billy-hoo when I hear him go up and bus' the light. He stove it to smithereens, thar warn't no mistakin' that thar sound, thar warn't."

"Did the scoundrel hang around after that?" coaxed Turner.

"Right away he went as soon as he done that dirty deed. I heard his steps a-sneakin' down from aloft; he comes through this room and then I hear him start to go below, but he stumbled and fell; then howls and cusses low, but it ain't

kilt him, fer five minutes later I hear the outdoor lock. I heard it plain as I hears you now. Then, hyuh I set all this time a-sufferin' what I I ain't suffered befo' and, with that howlin' wind in my years, a-killin' my brain to know what war happenin' on them wicked shoals. Ain't no signal of distress been seen? "

"Rest easy, Cap'n," assured Turner. "No ship's in trouble." So saying, the speaker made a warning sign to the rest of the group.

More questions were put by various members of the group, but no more definite information could be extracted. Then it was voted that the time for action had come. Several went upstairs to inspect the damage; others by the light of their lanterns examined the immediate neighborhood for footprints or other evidence of the criminal.

Turner and Jimmy joined first one and then another of the exploring parties; but it was soon evident that in the darkness nothing was to be expected, so man and boy decided the wiser course was to remain quietly with the Cap'n till the first sign of dawn.

CHAPTER XV

CAT FINDS A KEY

When Cat looked out after Turner and Jimmy disappearing in the darkness, he had to swallow a pretty bitter pill.

"Tough when a fellow's got the pep, not to have a chance to show it," he grumbled to himself.

Then, like the good loser he had always been, he began to soothe his feelings with common-sense reflections. Turner, it was clear, had some reason for wanting the smaller lad, and an addition to the party might be a drawback. It's pretty hard luck, however, to be left in a lonesome house when your chum is out running his nose into all sorts of exciting adventure.

"Well, I can eat anyhow," he consoled himself, and taking advantage of Hardy's invitation to the guests to forage in the pantry whenever appetite moved them, he managed to find and stow away a choice assortment of cake, pickles and crab-apples.

Thus bucked up with nourishment, he went upstairs and gazed out of the window in the direction of the lighthouse. In a few minutes, the expected light shone from the window, a mere ghost of a glimmer, but it told its tale.

"Gee!" thought the watcher, with a relieved sigh. "They're there, and I reckon everything's all right, except maybe old Buffum's sick or — dead. But dang it all, I do wish I could have had a night ride in the seaplane! That shark stuff wouldn't be in it."

Satisfied in his mind that his friends had safely reached their objective, the lad ran to the other end of the passage to take a look northward. In the distance a bright glow still illuminated the darkness, but it was evident that the roof of the ruin had already collapsed and that the blaze was slowly sinking to the smouldering embers.

Next he hurried down to the porch to scan the sea for rockets. No spark of signal fire was to be seen; but from the lighthouse still shone the feeble light.

"B'lieve I'll read till they come," he said, turning indoors again.

The Indian book, left on the table by Turner, attracted his attention. He settled himself in a chair by the light and, turning the pages at random, came to a passage that engaged his interest. He started reading aloud to break the monotony:

"'Arrows are the principal weapons that they use in war and in hunting. These arrows are barbed at the tip with a stone, sharpened and cut in the shape of a serpent's tongue; if knives are lacking, they use arrows also for flaying the animals which they kill. They are so adroit in bending the bow that they scarcely ever miss their aim; and they do this with such quickness that they will have discharged a hundred arrows sooner than another person can reload his gun. They take little trouble to make nets suitable for catching fish in the rivers, because the abundance of all kinds of animals which they find for their food renders them somewhat indifferent to fish.

"'However, when they take a fancy to have some, they enter a canoe with their bow and arrows; they stand up that they may better discover the fish; and, as soon as they see one, they pierce it with an arrow.'

"Gee!" the reader paused to remark, "I didn't know that, but, by golly! they haven't got much on our shark hunt with that stunt we pulled off this morning."

Turning to another page, he read on:

"'When they have escaped any great danger by sea or land, or have returned from war, in token of joy they make a great fire about which the men and women sit together, holding in their hands a fruit like a pumpkin or a gourd, which, after they have taken out the fruit and the seeds, they fill with small stones or big kernels to make the more noise, and fastening that upon a stick, they sing to its accompaniment and make merry.'

"Wish Indians or something else was around to stir up a little excitement. Darn if I'd care whether it was merry or not, just so it was noise," sighed the lone watcher, shutting the book with a slam and tossing it onto the table. "I can't stand this any longer," he continued. "I'm going down to meet Jimmy and Turner, that's what I'm going to do."

No sooner was it thought than acted upon. After providing himself with a flash-light from

Hardy's belongings, he hurried out, locking the door after him and pocketing the key. More stars were now shining, and, without assistance from his pocket light, he made his way to Lake Herring, pausing at times to listen for any possible suspicious sound.

Near the shore a distinct clanking struck his ear, but shooting his light, he discovered nothing more exciting than the chain of a wave-rocked rowboat attached to a post by the bridg of the hangar. The oars, their blades wet, lay across the seats.

"Why not take the boat," thought the boy to himself, "and row on over to Cape Peril?"

"No," objected his conscience, "you can't do it. You've got your orders."

"Gosh a Moses! Somebody's been using it already," was the lad's conclusion on a closer inspection of the boat. Then it occurred to him that the waves splashing over the sides had caused the soaking.

Suspicion of trespassers out of his mind, he went along the bridge and inspected the empty hydro shed. Then he started back to the shore, where temptation seized him again. He climbed

into the boat and began to finger the oars. Presently, releasing them, he began to play his flash-light around the bottom of the boat. Suddenly his eye was caught by a dull object. On closer observation, it proved to be an unusually large key of somewhat antique pattern.

"Where in the mischief did this come from?" he asked himself as he took it in his hand. "Looks like one I've seen before." And then, with a sudden flash of memory, "I know I've seen it before. It's the key to the Cape Peril lighthouse. If it's not, it sure is powerful like it."

The unusual size and make of the lighthouse key had attracted the boy's attention on the occasion of his visit to Cap'n Buffum.

"By golly! that's funny," he kept repeating. "How the mischief?"

He turned the key over and over in his fingers, but the longer he examined it the more convinced he was of its identity with the one he had noticed before.

"Maybe old Buffum's skipped — or maybe — I know, maybe that old woman's come and kidnapped him."

Both guesses were wild enough, but the most plausible he could hit on. He finally put the key into his pocket and sat spinning more speculations.

"Blame it!" he exclaimed after several minutes. "If Turner and Jimmy don't hurry I'm going." His eyes turned northward. "And I know where I'm going. I'm going over and take a look at that fire."

Glad to get away from any further temptation to use the boat, he acted on his new impulse and moved over to the path leading to the burning building. Jogging on, he had covered most of the way to his goal when suddenly he gave a start and came to a dead halt. Not far ahead of him and just back of the smouldering ruin he could distinctly see, lighted by the glow, a human form whose progress was so slow as to make it seem almost stationary.

Who was it? Cap'n Buffum was the lad's first thought, but, as he advanced a little farther, he was convinced that the figure was that of a less thick-set person. Whoever it was, the discovery called for instant action. He must get a closer view of the night prowler.

The boy began to run till he drew close to the blaze; then he veered off, skirting the shore just above the surf line. Opposite the fire, he slipped up to a sand hill, crawled to the top and peered over.

The form, though fast approaching the region of shadow, was still visible in the glow, and the sound of crunched sand was distinctly perceptible. The cause of the slow gait of the stranger was now apparent.

"He's got a game foot. Wonder if he's been shot," was the watcher's thought.

His scout training, the obligation to go to the aid of the injured, first asserted itself.

"You bet I won't go yet," was his second thought. "If he's all square, why didn't he come up to the house for help? I'll lay low till I find out what sort of bird he is. Gee!"

Up once more, the lad slipped along below the sand hills to a point well beyond the glow of the embers. Then he cautiously made his way to a higher point and looked over. The form, dragging slowly, was still in sight.

"I'm going to keep an eye on that fellow even if I run the risk of a bullet," Cat declared.

CHAPTER XVI

CAT IN AMBUSH

The mysterious prowler would be out of the firelight in a few moments more. Where was he going? That was the question that puzzled the lad. In the man's crippled condition, climbing the sand dunes would be an impossibility. Then Cat recalled that the path the man was following ended a short distance beyond at its point of intersection with an inland road that led to the county turnpike some three miles away from the ocean. Unless insane, the man had some objective in view, so what could it be but the road? And, up this road, there was no single habitation for half a mile's distance. It would take several hours to reach that at his present rate of progress.

"Must be somebody waiting for him at the road," the boy concluded. "I'll beat on up the beach ahead of him and lie hidden near the head of the road. The way he's going now, it'll take him fifteen minutes to get there."

There was no danger of pursuit by a lame man, and that any damage could be done by a bullet fired in the dark seemed equally unreasonable. Ambush seemed a safe proposition.

So the boy slipped softly down to the beach and, by the dim starlight, kept well up out of the way of the rolling surf. Once the thought came to him, "How 'bout it if there's a gang of crooks waiting there?"

Then he said to himself after a moment:

"I'm on my way and I'll keep on my way; that's Cat Miller."

Presently he had reached a point recognizable by landmarks as just opposite the meeting place of the inland extending road and the path that skirted the coast. Climbing up the bank, the boy stretched himself out and lay with head cautiously raised and ears alert. In case of any alarm, he knew he could slip down the bank and make off without difficulty in the darkness. The wind, sweeping over him, had little chill to it. He could stand that indefinitely.

He looked back in the direction of the slowly dying glow and listened. For ten minutes, perhaps, he heard nothing. Then suddenly, borne

on the sweeping wind, a sound, very, very faint — the sound of sand crunched under a boot. With head raised higher, he waited expectantly until he was sure he detected a dark shadow moving along the lighter background. All of a sudden the sound of footfalls ceased and a groan came in its place.

"Gee! he must be hurt bad," thought the lad. "Can't help it. I'll watch on."

Once more the sound of grating sand was heard; the stranger was moving. Very slowly he dragged along till he had reached a point just in front of his watcher; then, after a short pause and another groan, his footsteps seemed to be slowly retreating. Cat ducked as a searchlight flashed and he fidgeted in spite of himself. The man was evidently just getting his bearings.

In the lad's excitement, he kept crawling nearer and nearer the road head, worming along on his stomach as soldiers do in battle under shell fire. His curiosity was overpowering his discretion.

A few feet from the road the boy stopped, raised himself on his hands, and looked. The man, flashing his light at intervals, was still

moving away from him. Then the light was flashed straight ahead and the rear of a motor car was clearly in view.

"I see," said the boy, almost disappointed. "That's his game, is it? Wonder how many crooks there are in it."

But no sound of voices reached him.

"Must be whispering," he conjectured.

Presently the watcher started, with throbbing heart, as another sound, the faint put-put of a distant motor, reached his ears.

Meanwhile, the man, who was examining his machine, had caught the sound also. He turned his head as if to listen and Cat was able to get a brief glimpse of two horror-stricken eyes in a haggard face. It was a flash-light picture of agony.

The noise of the oncoming motor increased. Over a sandhill glowed the headlight of the approaching car. The man, apparently despairing of getting his engine started in time, had scurried off the road. Cat heard a vague sound as of a body rolling down a slope.

The boy fixed his eyes on the glow of the moving car, coming at a moderate speed around

the point where the road curved to avoid a sand mound. Suddenly he heard a crash, a sound of shattered glass, followed by noisy exclamations and then complete darkness. The chauffeur, not seeing the stationary car in time, had gone full tilt into one corner of it. A moment later a search-light flashed.

"What the mischief is this?" he heard the voice of the man who had jumped from the car say. Then were was a hum of voices.

"Lucky we had the heavier car, light as it is," another voice remarked.

"Wonder who in the mischief left a car standing out here without the sign of a light. Smashed the dickens out of his windshield and twisted his axle and fender, I see. We got off pretty easy."

"Suppose it could be the detective's car?" asked the man who had first spoken.

Cat, in a flutter of excitement, had been trying to catch every word of the dialogue. At the last speech, he gave a start; he had recognized the voice.

"Sure you didn't get any glass back there?" he heard the same voice remark.

"No, you bet I'm all right," came back in a youthful tone.

"Don't see anybody hanging around?" said the familiar man's voice.

"Not a soul," was the answer. "Keep your hand on your gun."

Cat, eager to call, lay still for fear of getting a bullet before he was recognized.

"Say, you'll camp by the machine, won't you, while I take this boy up to the house?"

Cat glided back rapidly and slipped down the bank until he felt himself protected from a hasty bullet. Then he yelled: "Hardy! Hardy! It's Cat. It's Cat Miller, don't shoot!"

He had recognized two of the three voices as those of Hardy and Legs Hatton.

CHAPTER XVII

HARDY STRIKES A HOT TRAIL

The morning of the day before, when Hardy had got the peevish doctor in place and had taken his own seat in the airplane, he steered his bird off from Roanoke Island in what, by no stretch of fancy, could be called flying weather. The wind was freshening to a gale and the waters of the Sound were choppy and ugly-looking. But, even if the pilot had to play hide and seek in the storm-clouds, the emergency admitted of no hesitation, and, after all, it was merely a question of a very few minutes' flying. So the venturesome airman gritted his teeth, clamped his rod, and with the machine swaying to and fro in the sweep and swelter and with wings at times perilously tipped, plunged into the teeth of the tempest.

As *Windjammer* approached the sea, the going became more and more hazardous; but the inevitable luck of the pilot warranted his confidence. He soon hovered over his goal, and, after

some maneuvering, the staggering feat was done. Under heavy pressure, he landed on the bleak coast in full view of the heaving ocean.

The danger over, Smith, the passenger, jumped from his seat with the change of countenance of a man risen from the dead. He evidently thought that for the rest of his life he would be living on borrowed time after what he had just been through. He recovered himself sufficiently, however, to lend his aid to Hardy in sheltering the flyer from the wind and threatening rain. Then the two proceeded to the lighthouse.

The wireless operator of the Kitty Hawk Station, who was in temporary charge, bubbled over with delight on seeing the new arrivals. The regular keeper had been removed to his home in a serious condition, he reported with a wealth of detail.

The doctor hurried off to his patient.

"Just given you up," he pursued, "and was looking for one deuce of a time. What with a storm roaring and bellowing, and the chance of my apparatus being blown to kingdom come, I wasn't feeling very jimmy."

"I know you weren't," agreed Hardy.

"And, by the way," continued the operator, "about two hours ago, just before my machine broke down, I picked up a message for Seagulls' Nest."

"You did? Let's have it quick," said Hardy eagerly, turning his head in order to listen with greater sharpness to the answer.

"It was from Commodore Hatton. Said he was passing and wouldn't be able to stop. He was trying to beat the gale and put into Hampton Roads. Important business was hurrying him."

"Where you s'pose the yacht is by this time?" demanded the pilot as the other paused.

"Judging by what they said when they spoke to us, the boat was then right off this point; so it must be well up the coast by now."

"Don't think he'll have any trouble making his port?"

"Ought not to. And see here, there was a message for us here, too. He had expected to stop in the Sound to report on that suspicious case—"

"Suspicious case? What suspicious case?"

insisted Hardy with breathless interest.

"I thought you'd got wind of that. That drowning."

"Drowning! Who? Where?"

"We all thought there was something crooked about it."

"Let's have it, man, quick!" Thought of the telltale lifeboat had instantly flashed across Hardy's brain.

"Well, I swear I thought you'd 'a heard of that by this time," the operator went on. "It was this way. A couple of weeks ago when the Commodore's yacht was lying here in the Sound to take on some local capitalists he was going to carry down to Mexico to look into those oil fields, there happened what looked like a pretty serious accident. The night before the boat planned to steam out was dark as tarred pitch. Now, it seems Hatton had a Dago or Greaser or some such cuss on board who could speak Spanish — s'posed to be taken along as an interpreter. Well, this night the fellow insisted on going ashore for one reason or the other; had to mail an important letter or send a telegram — some trumped-up excuse."

Hardy gave an involuntary start that the other did not fail to notice.

"And they went in one of the ship's boats?" the airman could not resist putting in.

"Of course, how else was he to go?" demanded the operator. "You didn't see him, did you?"

"No, go on!"

"Well, he got permission and picked a sailor to help him row. About twenty minutes after the pair had pulled off, the crew heard a yell from the water, a yell for help, and on lowering a boat to investigate, found this same sailor splashing around in the water pretty near played out, or making out he was. They hauled him aboard the lifeboat, got him on the yacht, and stimulated up to the talking point. Then he panted out a yarn about his lifeboat being run down in the Sound by a tug or something that didn't show a light, which sounds pretty fishy to start with. Said the boat was smashed, and that his companion must have gone down like a stone, for, as soon as he managed to get his own senses, he swam around and didn't see a sign of him. He floundered around, he claimed,

for several minutes; then he realized his only hope of safety was to make for the yacht half a mile away, a heap nearer than the shore. So he struck out and made it by the hardest.

"As soon as that bird told his tale, they got him to his bunk, for he did seem all in, and then the Commodore started to investigate. He sent another boat over to the supposed scene of the collision, but not a sign of anything was in sight — not a plank floating on the water so far as they could make out. Then they came over here and sent a message to the sheriff to be on the lookout and make every effort to recover the body."

"I've seen the boat," blurted out Hardy, who had been listening with deep absorption.

"The mischief you have!" exclaimed the operator, his eyes popping. "Where?"

Hardy recounted the story of the discovery on Knott's Island.

"The darn crook!" the operator burst out when he had heard him through. "That makes it clear as day. It was a frame-up."

"What does it all mean?" Hardy wanted to know.

"That's what I can't make out. Here a fellow who had just got a job, and then tries to beat it and make his employer think he is dead. Something behind it."

"Anything missing from the yacht in the way of valuables?"

"Nothing reported. You see, the Commodore had to steam out the next day, as he didn't have any more margin left him before the time he was due in Mexico. It appears a pile of money was dependent on his getting down in time to pull off a deal."

"So he left the next morning?"

"Must have! When I took a look out, the yacht was gone."

"Has Hatton communicated with anybody since he's been away?"

"I hear he's been in touch with the sheriff, but King — that's the deputy who's on the job — is mum as wax about it, attending to his own business. That's what I hear from Dareville."

"He has his headquarters in Dareville?" asked Hardy.

"Ye-ah, and I know they've made a pretty close search of the waters hereabouts for that

busted boat and the remains of the fellow Blanco."

"Called himself Blanco, did he?"

"That was the name he gave Hatton. I reckon he picked up that Buffalo Dare *alias* when he heard that crazy man's name over in Dareville."

"Funny the sheriff hasn't searched the other end of the Sound."

"Maybe he did, but detectives, amateur ones, think they know it all. They see pretty much everything but what's right under their noses."

"That's sure so," agreed Hardy. "But what happened to that rescued sailor? He must have been in the game."

"He was carried off in the yacht, but I understand that Hatton left word he would keep him close till the matter was cleared up."

"It's a blame funny thing," said Hardy, half to himself. "And beating it up to Knott's Island! That's not actually an island, though; it's connected with the mainland, and he could have made off on foot through the wilds. S'pose he had any reason to go to Cape Peril?"

A vague apprehension had seized the speaker

that the villain might be meditating some devilment in that direction.

"Cape Peril! If he's hooked something," declared the operator, "he's going to get to some big city and try to lose himself. No Cape Peril for him."

"Anyhow, I'd like to get over and interview that deputy."

"Well, you won't get that interview for some time yet, I'm thinking, from the sound of that wind and the look of that aggravated ocean. You're not fool enough to try to fly back, I hope."

"Not quite," conceded the pilot.

"Didn't think you were," granted the operator. "Reckon you want to solve this mystery before you pass in your checks."

"That would be some satisfaction," laughed the other.

"Glad you are gradually getting a little sense. Though I'm powerful glad you got here, believe me, if I'd been in your place, I'd stuck to where I was and let lighthouse keepers be hanged. But you airmen get to thinking you are windproof and thunderproof and every other sort of

proof until you slip a cog sometime and get a dose of discretion — that is, if you ever come to your senses again after you tumble."

"I know my business," asserted Hardy, somewhat hotly.

"They all do; I never knew one who wasn't thoroughly familiar with his business. Don't want to hear any more of this? All right. I'll shut up. But we're all fools in the same boat together."

Hardy had frowned, but his face cleared instantly. He didn't mind a little jollying.

"I have been a big one today," he granted. "I brought Commodore Hatton's son as far as Roanoke. Intended to leave him at Knott's Island, but, after that boat find and when Smith didn't turn up, the boy pestered me so I had to fly him further."

Then he told of the house-party at Seagulls' Nest.

"You're just a kid along with the rest of them," asserted the operator, "and you always will be. You'll never grow up till your dying day. Well, I reckon that's the way to die without making the acquaintance of trouble. I'm

thinking, though, the Commodore will make a little trouble for you if he hears about this trip."

"That's the reason I want to beat it back as soon as possible. Isn't there any way of getting off this forsaken sandbar?"

"Not today or tonight," declared the operator cheerfully. "Afraid you'll have to give me your company for some hours, or maybe days yet."

"Confound it!" exploded Hardy.

"'Tis pretty tough!"

"How long you think this blow will last?"

"To tell you the truth, I don't think it will be a long one." And he added, to give the excited man a grain of comfort, "Maybe a tug or something will be in hailing distance after the worst is over."

"If I can get over on anything floating," declared Hardy, grasping at the possibility, "I'll have you keep an eye on *Windjammer* and I'll try to scare up an auto to make Cape Peril through the country. Turner and I can come down in the seaplane after this blasted storm peters out and pick up my bird again."

With this arrangement in mind, the pilot tried

to make the best of the situation. He and the operator settled themselves in the wireless station to smoke and chat away the hours, interrupting the occupation to snatch a bite to eat and, ever and anon, to inspect the prospects out of doors and the condition of the barometer. Amid the howling wind and the rain, they sat till the tempest that evening had spent its force. By ten o'clock things looked vastly more promising.

At this hour, Hardy learned to his great delight that a tug, weathering the blast on the Sound side of the Kitty Hawk bar, was about to put out for Roanoke Island and then proceed to Knott's Island and he found that he could get accommodations for the voyage over.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE NIGHT RIDERS

When Hardy set foot on Roanoke Island, he probably felt almost as elated as did the first English settlers in America when they landed near the same spot three hundred and thirty-odd years before. For him, however, it was the mere start of the journey. His business was to get Hatton back to Cape Peril and get him there in a hurry. Besides, he still felt disturbed about the whereabouts and devilish plans of this mysterious Blanco.

With some difficulty, the pilot made his way up the unpaved street of the still and desolate hamlet. Scarcely a light was visible. The Darevillers, even if not all healthy, wealthy and wise, were early to bed at any rate; and persons prowling around after nine o'clock were more or less suspicious. Hardy, steering his course by a solitary lamp shining through a window of the "hotel," reached the porch without interference, and no sooner had his foot touched the

planks than the vigilant Legs was out of the door, and, in another moment, let out a yell of recognition.

"Shut up," urged Hardy. "Stop your fuss, or we'll both be jugged by the constable for disturbing the peace at this ungodly hour; it must be nine o'clock if it's a minute."

"How did you get here? What's happened?" the boy shot at him in a slightly lowered tone.

"Let's get in out of this wind and I'll tell you." Inside, Hardy proceeded to recount hurriedly the events since his abrupt departure. The boy listened breathlessly. Relieved to hear that his father's yacht was well on to port, his mind gave all its attention to the Blanco mystery.

"I thought that fellow looked like a slick one," declared the lad when Hardy had finished his story, "but he sure had father hoodooed."

This was an afterthought, inspired by recent events. The truth was, when the lad got his glimpse of the interpreter, he had not given him much attention one way or the other.

"And you don't know any reason the man had for making off this way?" asked Hardy.

"Not unless he's swiped something," was

Legs's suspicion. "But, say, let's get on that tugboat. I'll die if I stay in this place ten minutes longer."

"'Fraid you'll have to die, then. I'm going to get hold of that sheriff first. I'm going to wake a few citizens up if I start a riot in doing it."

The landlord was the first to suffer. He was finally rooted out in a state of negligee and indignation; but, when the airman offered to pay for the boy's room and for one he himself might occupy, but did not intend to, the appeased host agreed to dress and direct the way to King's house.

"Reckon it's a good thing to get rid of that kid," he thought to himself. "I never seen such a squirmy varmint since I was bawn."

Ten minutes later, Hardy was knocking on the door of the deputy sheriff. Fortunately that official, after being detained abroad on some criminal business, was still awake over a late supper. He ushered his guests in politely and a very reasonable sort of person he turned out to be.

"Yes, I've had some cable messages from Commodore Hatton," he returned to Hardy's

questions, after listening to the pilot's interests in the matter. "He's got enough evidence to convict that crook if we can get the hooks in him. What he done I don't know any more than you do. All I know is I've got to try to catch him. I've wired the description around, and I think we're on the trail. What you tell me about that boat you found goes in with a report I got that a man lookin' like Blanco was seen in the back country not far from Knott's Island. But I've got hold of another piece of information I can't let out yet, and I'm going up Norfolk way tomorrow — was going today if the boats hadn't been held up by this here storm. Commodore Hatton offers right smart money reward if the man's landed."

"How about going tonight?" suggested Hardy.

The deputy gave a look that showed he thought he was dealing with a lunatic.

"I'm not dangerous," laughed Hardy, interpreting the other's glance. Then he told of the waiting tugboat.

"What would you do when you got to Knott's Island?" objected the reluctant deputy.

"That's easy," explained Hardy. "I've got a friend there who owns an automobile. He'll lend it to me for love or money, or maybe both. We'll get to the island, if the tug don't break down, by one o'clock. It's an hour's or an hour and a half's run to Cape Peril. I'll put you up at Seagulls' Nest, my place there, till tomorrow, and then send you wherever you want to go."

"Rotten roads and a howlin' night," meditated the deputy.

"You can sleep on the tug and take a wink in the auto," promised the other. "I'll attend to the roads. Nash's car's special trick is climbing out of mud holes."

The deputy thought a while longer, figured on what he would save financially, consulted his wife in retirement, got her permission after some argument, and made himself ready to go.

Shortly after the three night travelers were aboard, the tug bravely started, ploughing the rolling waters on its way up the Sound. Hardy and the deputy had soon made themselves comfortable on benches and were sound asleep. Legs, however, had to contend for an hour with a queasy feeling closely related to seasickness.

One o'clock found the party safely ashore on Knott's Island, and by the aid of the lantern of the tugboat captain they managed to pick their way to Nash's store. His dwelling place was above and, in the rear, stood his garage.

"Well, I'll be jiggered again!" was his exclamation when he was roused after some effort in the way of door pounding and, armed with a pistol, came down to investigate the disturbance. "I'll be jiggered! How'd you get here this time o' night? Darn if I don't b'lieve you've been fool enough to fly."

The pilot rattled out his explanation and the pressing business in hand, offering ample compensation for the use of the auto.

"Anything to accommodate a friend like you," said the good-natured Nash. "Just so you don't ask me to go with you."

The motor was produced, Hardy took the wheel, the deputy the place by him, Legs sprawled on the rear seat, and the car was off, leaving the owner almost as flabbergasted as he had been at first sight of his visitors.

To call the road across Knott's Island bad would be to compliment it; it was one not to be

mentioned in polite motoring society. But some cars can negotiate almost anything, and Nash's car was of that breed. When this nightmare of a trail was left behind and the car crossed the tongue of land that connected the so-called "island" with the mainland, they struck a passable shellroad, and Hardy, having the law by his side, tried to outspeed the wind on his northwesterly journey. An hour's run brought him to the point where the branch road struck off in the direction of Seagulls' Nest. He had made this without incident to the point where he was rounding the curve. Here, knowing that he had practically reached his destination, he had taken his eyes from the illuminated road in front to direct the deputy's attention to the position of Cape Peril, with some remarks about the possible effects of the storm, when, to his consternation, he found he was right on an object standing to one side in the road. An instant's glance showed him it was a runabout, but despite his desperate effort to veer off he was unable to avoid crashing into it.

Then followed the excited talk that Cat Miller had heard from his covert.

CHAPTER XIX

KNITTING UP THE CLUES

"Who's that?" demanded Hardy sharply when he heard a voice cry out in the darkness.

All three from the colliding auto were instantly on the alert.

"It's Cat! Cat Miller!" sang out the voice lustily. "Don't shoot! It's Cat."

"It *is* Cat!" assured Hatton excitedly.

Hardy, who, at the first sound, had drawn his revolver, now returned it to its holster, and yelled out: "Where in the dickens are you? Come on here!"

Cat bounded up and ran forward. As soon as his face came into the glare, it showed an expression of the greatest agitation.

"There was a man, a man, lame, trying to get into the machine," he panted out to the perturbed listeners. "He slipped down there!"

The boy stretched his hand toward the left road side. "I heard him! I saw him!"

His astounding news created a great stir

among the new arrivals. Hardy and the deputy instantly drew their pistols, pulled the two boys up to the shelter of the machine, and, after extinguishing the light, managed to get from the youngster a coherent story of what he had seen.

All had crouched and dropped their voices to whispers.

"It must be him," declared the deputy.

Then followed a brief recital of what had gone on at Seagulls' Nest, of the extinguished light, Turner's excursion, and the discovery of the telltale key.

"The dastardly scoundrel!" exploded Hardy, in spite of himself. "That's his game, is it?"

The deputy urged absolute silence on all while he listened.

"Not safe to follow him till light," whispered the officer to Hardy. "If he's lame, he can't get far."

"Wonder if Turner winged him?"

He was concerned about what might have happened at Cape Peril.

"Look here," whispered the officer in Hardy's ear. "We must get these boys away from here."

Hardy thought a moment, then he said in a low tone to the two lads:

"Here, boys, you get on to the house. Make a break for the shore and beat it back as fast as you can; and, when you get there, stay locked up till morning light. As soon as Turner turns up, tell him what's doing. Mr. King and I will watch here off by the road with an eye on the machine. No questions. Now go, and be quick!"

Cat was inclined to protest, but Hardy shut him up without ceremony, and the two boys, Cat leading, made a break for the shore and under the shelter of the sand bank started off for Seagulls' Nest.

"Great Gee, Legs! This is the dickens, ain't it?" said Cat, making himself heard against the wind when he felt they were at a safe distance.

"You're right it is!" returned Hatton.

"Who was that other man?" Cat was eager to know.

"That was the sheriff from Roanoke Island. He's after the crook. Father cabled him, and say, Cat, I found the boat that put 'em on the

trail and — and — but I can't talk in this noise and watch my step at the same time. Wait till we get there."

When the pair reached the house, Miller opened the door, locked it carefully after them, and, exhorting Legs to back him up, made a thorough search of the lower floor. Everything appeared intact, and Luke was still busily snoring away in his cubicle. Then followed a thorough examination of the upper floor, with the assistance of the lamp. Nothing exciting there. A glance through the window showed the light still gleaming through the window of Cape Peril. On the heights beyond, another fire was glowing. To Legs' uneasy inquiries Cat explained this as probably another beacon.

Then they betook themselves to their bedroom and stretching out on their cots, started to swap yarns. First came Legs's find and its sequel; then Cat told of the killing of the shark.

"I might 'a been inside that sucker right this minute," speculated the narrator at the end of his shark tale, "if my foot had slipped. Gee! You were lucky Legs, he'd a swiped one of your props sure."

Their own experiences exchanged, their minds turned to the future.

"No chance of that lame duck crawling away," assured Cat, with regard to the man in hiding, "and if he tries it, Hardy will sure wing him."

"We're not sure it's the same man yet," doubted Legs.

"I'd bet the airplane I expect to own some day on it," Cat declared.

"Well, it won't be long before we know, will it?"

"'Bout an hour or two," returned Cat, languidly.

For the last ten minutes, their conversation had been growing more and more forced. Both were worn out, and tired nature was gradually asserting itself.

A few more remarks and then the two yielded completely, their best intentions to hold out shattered. Without interference the garrison, three strong, including Luke, all fast asleep, held the fort until—

CHAPTER XX

COMPARING NOTES

At noon, Hardy burst into Turner's room at Seagulls' Nest with a loud exclamation. There lay the Tarheel on his bed with most of his clothes on, fast asleep. It took some pretty strenuous shakes to arouse him.

"Wake up here, and tell me what's happened," demanded the newcomer.

"Hardy!" exclaimed the aroused man, sitting up.

"I'm Hardy, all right. It's twelve o'clock, man, and everything in this establishment asleep as the dead. I broke in here and found Luke still hitting it off; then I rushed up stairs and hammered the boys' door — locked and not a sound, then there was Jimmy asleep on my bed, and here you are in the same condition."

"How did you get here?" asked Turner, now wide awake.

"Tell you in a minute as soon as you explain yourself."

"Where is Legs?"

"Haven't you seen him? Isn't he here?" Hardy flashed out in alarm.

"I haven't seen him. I thought Cat was in that room by himself," Turner protested. "Jimmy and I got back from the lighthouse at daybreak. There was trouble over there—"

"I know."

"You do!" exclaimed Turner.

"Yes, Cat told me, last night."

Turner stared. "You got in last night?"

"'Bout two o'clock and a deuce of a time I've had since."

"For heaven's sake, you didn't fly, did you?"

"Don't talk like a fool, Turner. I came in a motor. I'll tell you all that in a minute. But what I want to know first is where Cat and Hatton are."

"You say you looked in their room and they weren't there?"

"Wake up! I said the boys' room was locked. Here, I'm going to see."

He grabbed up a chair and rushed from the room. In a few moments he was back, before

the bewildered Turner could fully come to his senses.

"They're there all right," Hardy announced, with a look of relief. "I peeped over the transom, and saw 'em dead — asleep."

"How did Legs get in there if you didn't know it?" persisted Turner.

Hardy immediately started his story and, while Turner listened with tense interest, brought it down to the point where he sent the lads away from the scene of the collision.

"After we got rid of the boys," he proceeded, "King and I squatted down on the side of the road with our fingers on the triggers of our automatics to fix our unknown friend in case he tried to make off in our machine. His was out of commission good and proper. We listened and listened, but not a suspicious sound did we hear. As soon as day broke and we could see objects with some clearness, we began to peer around cautiously. Nothing suspicious was to be seen in the immediate neighborhood of the machine, but just beyond, were tracks. Now about fifty feet from the road, there is a slope of some fifteen-foot fall. We crawled up to this

and took a look over. No human being was in sight, but there were marks as of a body that had rolled down. We were on the trail.

"Leading from this little valley, there was a sort of pass between the sand hills. So we snaked around, making a wide detour and crawled up to the top of one of these. Tracks were distinctly visible in the depression. We slid down and followed these to a broad stretch of sandy ground beyond. You remember that well enough. There was the trail plain as day. The man had evidently been dragging along by the hardest effort. Now and then, we could see traces of his having sat down or lain in the sand. At the distance of about a quarter of a mile, in a more exposed place, the tracks disappeared, evidently covered by the wind-blown sand, but we calculated it would have been impossible for a man in the condition Cat described to get much further in the short time since the collision.

"To avoid the chance of being pinked from cover, we slipped up to the top of a dune near the ocean and tried to search with our eyes every foot of ground around. Suddenly I lit on a

peculiar low mound on the side of the dune nearer the ocean and thought I saw sand roll down as if dislodged by something stirring beneath. I called King's attention, and he agreed with me. There was a telltale place in the sand partly covered by a piece of wood that, in our whispered consultation, we decided was left for an air hole. Our course of action was decided on. We circled around, crawled to the top of that sand hill, and, getting our bearing, slid down a space and then both gave a spring and piled plumb on that suspected spot. And great Lawd, man, you would have thought we'd hit the top of a volcano, from the shindy the corpse raised when it acknowledged receipt of our attention, but we had him pinned and it was a question of his suffocating in two minutes, or lying quiet. First a foot resurrected, a shoeless foot swollen to twice its natural size, and then an arm. The right hand, not the left with the stumped fingers."

"He had two stumped fingers on his left hand, did he?"

"How did you know that? Did you see him?" inquired Hardy in surprise.

"No, but Buffum got a glimpse of his paw when he tied him up!"

"Tied him up before he smashed out the light?"

"Go on," insisted Turner eagerly. "I'll tell you my part when you finish your story. Go on! Go on!"

"Well, the exciting part about that right hand was that it held an automatic, but I had that out of his grasp with one grab. He wouldn't have had the strength to pull the trigger anyhow, for he was pretty near done for as it was. The rising of those limbs was just a sort of convulsion, I reckon. In two seconds more, we had him dug out and exposed to light, and a more perfect picture of abject misery I never saw. His face was nearly black from the smothering. A man of fifty-odd, he was, and a sinewy specimen for his age, and he must have had a ton of endurance, for how he managed to stump that far on that broken foot gets me."

"Then he broke it when he fell down the lighthouse stairs and—" Turner could not help putting in, but, as Hardy paused and seemed eager to have him go on, he declined to say more

before his friend had finished his part of the story.

"All right, I'll stick to it," promised Hardy. "He wasn't such a bad looking specimen, not the book kind of villain at all, looked more like a sort of dissipated seaman, but his eyes when we got the sand out were sorry sights, and the grilling he had been through hadn't improved their beauty any. It was fifteen minutes before our handcuffed friend had recovered enough to use his mouth, and then it was to emit groans and yells of pain, but we were determined to make him talk and we told him not a step would we carry him till he loosened up. Then he yowled out something about having lost his way and sprained his ankle, and asked, for heaven's sake, or words to that effect, to be taken to a doctor.

"King gave him his word of honor he should have a doctor's assistance as soon as he got to the county jail; and proceeded to take from his own pocket and read a detailed description of the man Blanco, who had disappeared from the yacht under pretense of drowning, and informed him of the discovery of the boat I told you about

just now, with some other particulars I'll tell you later. Meanwhile, I was searching his person, and found a pocketbook with a fat roll of bills in it. If he had had any burglar tools, he had chucked them away somewhere. Well, he proceeded to yowl and deny some more, but we'd had enough of that, so, handcuffed and trussed up, he was trotted off to our auto. The machine was battered, but would run all right, so we hurried our captive up the road to the county jail, sent for a doctor and left him to his happy meditations.

"First thing, we got in communication by long distance with Commodore Hatton in Newport News."

"He was there, was he?" questioned Turner.

"Sure, his yacht got in safely early in the afternoon."

"Then, thank the Lord, it wasn't his boat that came near hitting the shoals last night!" Turner rejoiced.

"He was snug in port by four o'clock, it seems, and was making ready to get on Blanco's trail this morning. First thing he wanted to know was about the boys, and you can bet your

boots, I was happy when I could tell him his son and the others were safe and well at Seagulls' Nest. Of course, I didn't blow on you and Jimmy. After he'd got the boys off his mind, he informed me his skipper would be down today to identify the man, and give us all particulars. I hurried on back to find out what was going on in this roost, and left word for the skipper to follow here when he finishes with the bird and has his talk with King at the jail. Now it's your turn."

After a few questions Turner started on his story. Finally, he reached the mystery of the boat missing when he started for Cape Peril and in place on his return.

"Miller told me this morning he found it there not long after you left. Seems he got restless and wandered down to meet you and saw the boat. It was just after he hiked over in the direction of the fire, spied the escaping bird and still had his eye on him when my machine came in sight and collided."

Then Hardy had to give more particulars of the collision.

"I remember now," said Turner, returning

to the boat incident. " Jimmy thought he heard a rowboat. The little rascal had keener ears than I had, for that devil must have put in just after we left."

" And Cat found the lighthouse key in the boat, too," announced Hardy, to Turner's further amazement.

The two continued their speculations for some minutes longer as to the means Blanco used to accomplish his purpose and his plans for escape.

" Now I've just got to have a little sleep," asserted Hardy. " You'd better go down and be sure that Luke's stirring. Give him orders to wake us all up when the food is ready, but right this minute I'd rather sleep than eat."

So, leaving Turner to attend to this commission, he hurried to his room, stretched himself on a cot by the one Jimmy was occupying and fell asleep in a moment.

CHAPTER XXI

THE SKIPPER FILLS THE GAPS

It was three hours later before breakfast or luncheon, or whatever else the meal might be called, was forthcoming. Turner's first commission to Luke was to carry a note to Cap'n Buffum telling of the discovery of the criminal and to inform the fishermen that further search was unnecessary. The messenger had to pick his way with some care along the beach, and when he reached Cape Peril, took as long as possible to deliver his message, so that it was quite an hour and a half before he was back on his job again.

Turner was the first one to awake. He decided to let Hardy sleep, but shook up the boys, and such a riot of conversation as resulted had seldom been heard before. At the table they hardly noticed what they were swallowing, so busy were they getting the full story from Turner and comparing notes with one another. In antic-

ipation was the promised arrival of the yacht's captain from Newport News.

About four o'clock, this person, Williams by name, arrived in an auto. Hardy was summoned at once to meet him, and, with the group gathered about, the new arrival first insisted on pumping everyone present for details concerning the apprehension of Blanco, and then told his story, or at least as much as he was at liberty to reveal.

The substance of his revelations was about as follows:

"When that fellow was taken on at Newport News, I didn't like his looks from the start, but the Commodore was clean taken in by his Spanish talk and, as the occasion was a pressing one, he thought he'd be an invaluable man. He was good at the typewriter, too, and seemed to have picked up right smart education. Had letters of recommendation that I reckon were faked. You know, the Commodore wanted to get hold of oil lands down there in Mexico and there were other companies trying to beat him to it. Now, it turns out that this Blanco, or Perkins — if your friend Buffum is right — or whatever else his name was

(I don't believe for a second he was a Mexican) was in the pay of the Revolutionists down there, who wanted to get some proof that the regular government was having dealings with foreigners over the oil lands. So he got on to the Commodore's game, landed the place on the yacht, and made off with some papers that time he worked his drowning stunt. The loss of the papers wasn't discovered till later, and then we got the dots on that sailor who was in with him. He had bribed the man for a big sum to be delivered to him by an accomplice in Mexico if things worked.

" When we got to Mexico, we found some of the revolutionists had gone over to the government side and given away some of the secrets. This game was one of them. Blanco hears this by cipher cablegram, I figure out, and, knowing the Commodore intended to turn up heaven and earth to discover him, and that his enemy had planned to stop by Cape Peril to take on his son, he hangs around here and makes one desperate effort to send the boat down with all on board. It was a fool thing to try, as the chances were all against him, but sometimes a hunted

criminal will do the craziest things in creation. Anyhow, he slipped his cog this time."

The captain went on to give some minor details that had no great bearing on the main point at issue, and finally announced that he could make no further disclosures.

"Now, young men," he said at last, turning to young Hatton and his two companions, "I've got a message for you. Your parents were scared to death about you boys during that wind storm yesterday and their nerves weren't helped when they heard about that crook being in this neighborhood, so I was told to let you know you must come home to-morrow."

"Oh, Gee!" demurred Cat, with a sour look. "They don't think we're babies, do they? I know *my* dad wasn't worried."

"I don't bring any full particulars of their state of mind; all I know is that you're directed to come home."

"How're we going to get there?" objected Jimmy. "We can't walk, and Mr. Hardy's plane is at Kitty Hawk."

"'Fraid they wouldn't let you come home in a plane after all this excitement, if there were a

hundred here. The Commodore's auto will be waiting at two sharp. That's my message and you've got it."

There was some further grumbling, but, on second thought, towns were pretty good places to spread big news, so the return wasn't so bad after all. However, it was a little ignominious for new-fledged flyers to have to return in such a tame fashion as a motor car.

Williams finally took his departure, and the rest of the day was occupied with intervals of eating, sleeping and talking. The ocean, the hosts decided, was not yet sufficiently tame for a dip. Then came night with a good and much needed ten hours' sleep for every soul in the establishment.

CHAPTER XXII

THE TRIALS OF CAP'N BUFFUM

The morning of the next day, the day of departure, was calm and peaceful as if tempests in the air and the sea and the souls of men were things unknown. This time, it was the calm after the storm instead of before one. But the thrills were still vivid in the minds of the three boys, and would stay with them till their last day.

They were reconciled enough to go now, for they were all bursting with eagerness to take the town by storm, and to see themselves written up with photos in *The News and Herald,* as Hardy had confidently predicted they would be. The hosts, too, realized that, after the momentous episodes of the last two days, any further stay might prove tame and tiresome; that it was better for the boys to leave while in the highest feather. Then they would be eager to come again sometime.

The first pleasant duty after breakfast was to

trot off merrily together to call on Cap'n Buffum. He was still a little shaky, but eager to hear over and over again the circumstances, outside of his own part, in the apprehension of the man he confidently asserted to be Perkins. Though with some little nervousness he looked forward to the time when he should be summoned as a witness to face the man in court.

Finally, the visitors announced that they must be off.

"Sorry to see ye go," declared the old man huskily. "One of ye did me a turn I won't never fergit, and all of ye would a done the like if the 'casion had riz to do it. Come back to see Bill Buffum, will ye? I ain't no more'n teched the top layer o' my pile o' sea-yarns. I don't have to do like the preachers—turn my bar'l over and start 'em all over agin. Blister my boots, *my* bar'l ain't got no bottom, *it* ain't."

"You bet we'll come back," asserted Cat. "Won't we, fellows?"

"You bet we will!" echoed the other two.

A gratified smile crossed the keeper's face.

"Say, Cap'n Buffum," suggested Legs, "how about running up and spending a week-

end at our house? Mother and Father sure would be glad to see you."

"My weak end is my legs, boy, though I ain't quite sho' it ain't my head sence I war tied up," returned the old man with a chuckle. "No, lad, I can't run up nowhar. I couldn't do that. I ain't never took the lessons how to 'nipulate them tools and whatcha-may-call 'ems you toney folks eats with, and, when I shovels peas in my mouth with these hyuh narrow-bladed eatin'-knives they gives you these days, blister my boots, if half o' them slippery green pellets don't slide off into my lap.

"A ole-timer like me don't feel good and comfortable in the towns nowadays noway; they is always a scramblin' 'em upside down, and what you see one day you don't see no mo' the nex', till my brains is well-nigh addled. But, though the ships may change, this hyuh water don't. So I'll stick down hyuh where nobody can't be a-messin' and a-meddlin' with the scenery, and what I sees one night I knows will be thar the nex' mornin'.

"The old time towns war the places fer me, when, seem like all the houses had been there a

hundred year, and ev'y drug-sto' had colored three and fo' story jars a settin' in the window, red and green and yaller and cinnamon and pink, maybe; and, in front of ev'y tobakker shop war a wild Indian carved o' wood pintin' at the do' with his tommyhawk. And the patent medicine men used to come aroun' in their kerridges and spring the side-splittin'es' jokes I ever hyeard that made me bow-leggeder than I war by nature. Them war the towns I could navigate in. But thank you kindly, lad, jus' the same. Thank you agin.

"Now to go back to that there Perkins," he hurried on to avoid having to decline once more the invitation Hatton seemed on the point of repeating. "You may calkerlate he's been in my mind considerable and I ain't denyin' most o' them thoughts warn't complimentary, and boys, I laid thar las' night on my donkey's breakfast—"

"Lay on what?" asked the wondering Jimmy.

Cap'n Buffum's eyes kindled with laughter as he nodded towards his bed.

"That's what we sailor boys used to call our straw mattresses we bunked on when we warn't

a'swingin' in hammocks. I laid thar and thought what I'd do if that thar Bill Perkins war to be brought back now to ask me to fergive him. But I'd a done same as I tol' you befo' he played his las' trick on me. Says I to myself, ' You'd fergive him. Maybe he warn't responsible. His mammy might 'a let him fall on his head when he war a puppy and that busted his good intentions. I'd fergive him and if you're good scouts you'd fergive him, too."

"It was fun for us," asserted Jimmy with relish.

"Have yo' fun," rejoined the good old soul, with great seriousness, "thar's plenty o' room fer it, but don't have it over other folks wickedness er their tribulations. Play your game squar, lads, play it squar."

"You bet we'll do that," Jimmy hastened to make amends for his blunder.

"Now, look at that thar Perkins," proceeded the Cap'n. "Fer thirty year and mo' he's been a prowlin' up and down the earth inventin' new kinds o' meannesses. What a mess o' evil he done thar ain't no way o' knowin'; but he's come to the end o' his rope now. I'll be boun' on

that. Mo'n one man, lads, starts a-skyrocketin' and ends a coal-chutin'. It's the way a man ends — not speakin' o' bow-legs — that counts. Always have a good end in mind and you won't never go wrong. That's what you scouts is fer, ain't it?"

"That's our oath," declared Legs solemnly.

Cap'n Buffum paused long enough to re-light his pipe and take a few puffs. The operation seemed to change the trend of his thoughts and he proceeded with the utmost good-humor, "A lively time, lads, you've had fer a picnic. I b'lieve it beats, so fer as quickness of action is consarned, any sea tale I got in my locker. I never knowed so much to happen in twenty-four hours befo' in peace times on a picnic, but, fer all the dangers me and you have been through, they ain't nothin' to what I'm facin' this hyuh minute." The old man's face suddenly became solemn.

"Not afraid Bill Perkins will break loose, are you?" asked Cat.

"I ain't afraid er nothin dead er alive," he returned promptly, and then added, "exceptin' one. I kin face everything that give me a fair

show that's live and, as fer the dead, I kin handle easy all the sperits I ever seen. But it's sumpin' else a-pesterin' me. You recollec' I tol' you about what war lef' o' a gal I had once. Well that very evenin', day befo' yestiddy it war, I got a letter. It begun with one 'o them healths repo'ts. ' I hev gained ten pounds since I saw you, Bill, and I'm eatin' my heart out fer you'. Says I , when I reads that, ef it agree with er that good, she better keep on a-eatin' and thar ain't no tellin' to what dimensions she'll swell to. Then come the bombshell, lads, when she continue, ' I'm a-comin' down to a picnic in the fishwagon next Saturday week, just me and a basket, and me and you can set on the sand and eat fried chicken and pull the wishbone and talk old times together. Ef my head is gray, my heart is evergreen.'

" Lads, the way I feel when Bill Perkins knot me up warn't nothin' to the aggravated feelin' I has when I sets eyes on them words. But no fried chicken ner broiled nuther, with or without wishbones, ain't a-goin' to tear me from this hyuh light. It's my duty, this hyuh light is, and, blister my boots, duty is the almighti-

est word in the whole English language, or the Chinese either, I reckon. It's the bes' motto to live by, and, when you casts yo' las rope, ain't nothin' like it fer to give you a smooth passage.

"You're them things they calls scouts, and you hev proved you kin hol' yo' own with any man that ever shaved a whisker er let 'em grow either. Keep a scoutin' straight, and thar ain't nothin' goin' to down you nowhar. Take Bill Buffum's word fer it."

After a few more words and repeated promises to return before long, the lads were off on their way back to Seagulls' Nest.

"When I get old and all my children get married," remarked Jimmy prospectively as they trudged along, "blessed if I don't keep a lighthouse. He's the happiest old geezer I ever saw."

"Da-da-da-da-da!" hummed Cat, with a gibe in his eyes.

"What'll your wife be doing?" asked Legs.

"She can keep one, too, and we can talk by wireless. No telling what women will be doing by the time I get old and greybearded."

Cat chortled.

"Say, Jimmy," he joked, "if you get one of those tall ones, she'll reach over and haul you out without standing on tiptoe."

"You better be satisfied if you can get one any size with that mouth," Jimmy retorted.

But as boys are not usually oversensitive about their mis-features, all three reached the house without bloodshed.

CHAPTER XXIII

EXIT THE SEABOARD AIRLINE PATROL

Some hours later, the Hatton motor was waiting for its three passengers at the end of the road by the sea. Brisk as bees and as noisy as a brass band, the youngsters had been stirring around packing up their shark's teeth and other mementoes. This occupation was interrupted by Hardy with a proposition that met with loud approval.

"Stop just one minute. We've got to have a small-sized ten minute jamboree before you boys go, with a pledge and promise you'll come again for a rest cure, just fishing and swimming and such quiet parlor sports. I'll promise your parents to have every villain exterminated from the county."

"Just keep one or two loose," suggested Cat with a grin. "We don't want to go stale."

"You'd go something worse than that with a few more nights like that wild one we managed to live through. But here comes Luke with the

cakes and ginger ale for a last pledge and promise."

With a whoop the scouts crowded around the refreshments, and, glasses in hand, listened to an announcement from Hardy: "Last night to soothe myself, so I could get to sleep after all the excitement, I scribbled off some little verses which are appropriate to each of the three young Scoutlets toasted — You get what I mean, I hope," he interrupted with a laugh, "You'll find them highly complimentary. Now here's to Miller first":

With great applause all glasses were raised.

"Here's to Cat Miller, a taking young fellow,
He never gets blue and rarely shows yellow;
He flies in the sky and he dives in the ocean,
And flirts with a shark when struck by the notion.
He craftily trails on a crook in the night,
But yells like a wildcat when faced by a light."

"Pretty tough on a brave scout," declared Cat, pretending indignation, while the other two applauded vociferously.

"You get off easy in this Knockers' Club," asserted Hardy. "Listen at this. Glasses up!

"Now the next of this gang that the poet will chat on,
Is a fellow who's known for keeping his Hatt-on;
In meat, he is rich and in brains he is rare,
And, as to his legs, he has nothing to spare;
He has aeroed by day and motored by night,
Though everyone saw he was pallid with fright."

This brought whoops from Cat and Jimmy and a slightly pained look from the sensitive Legs.

"Cheer up, Legs, and listen to the dose Jimmy gets:

"Now here's to that bold young adventurer Jimmy,
Though he's long on his tongue he can't be called limby;
The wind and the waves had to give him a wide row,
When he jumped over Herring one night in a hydro;
And now, meeting people, he tries hard to stuff 'em,
By claiming he's rescued a sailor named Buffum."

Jimmy here got all that was coming to him from his two chums, and the ginger-ale went its way merrily.

"Now, look here, fellows," exhorted Hardy, "Hope you didn't take that seriously? I meant just the opposite, didn't I, Turner? You're the swellest lot of chaps I know, but I just wanted to see how you'd take a little merry knocking.

You've got to take a lot of it later, and maybe it's a good thing to keep chaps from getting the swell-head. You know some freshmen in college have to be taken down a peg for their own good. Get me?"

The boys took the lesson in good part, and the jollity went on till the refreshments were exhausted. Then the lads were off to get their packs in final trim.

Jimmy was the first to finish and make his appearance. He took his seat at the table and began to scribble, when Turner, who had been chatting with Hardy on the porch, came in.

"Look here, Jimmy," he asked, "just a little curiosity on my part, but, if I swear not to let it out, can't you tell me what shut Cat Miller up so quick the other day when he thought he had the joke on you about the whales' egg?"

"Sure I'll tell you if you won't give it away," said Jimmy, looking up slyly from his paper. "You see, Cat's people didn't move to Newport News till he was about seven years old. Well, I ran across a fellow at the Springs from the town Cat lived in before and he let it out that Cat's mother used to call him 'Buttercup' when he

was a baby and kept on calling him that till he was about seven, and then they christened him Alonzo. Wouldn't that jar you? So when Cat tries any monkey business on me, I just buzz 'Buttercup' in his ear, and he shuts up like a clam. 'Course I'm not going to squeal on him, but it don't hurt to have some ammunition handy to make your friends behave, does it?"

"You're sure right," laughed Turner. "Buttercup! If that ain't a rich one! Butternut, I'll say. It sure is one rich handle to a modest mug. Don't worry, I'll keep it tight."

He went off chuckling to himself, and, for the next week every time Cat's face rose in his mind and he thought of the endearing name, he chuckled again.

A few minutes later when Cat and Legs came bounding down the stairway swinging their knapsacks, they found Jimmy still engaged with the paper.

"All ready for the home run," shouted Cat, grabbing at the writer's collar. "Come on, Jimmy! Eh, what you doing there? Writing a letter to the shark's grandma to tell her about her grandson's funeral?"

"One second," insisted the writer, as he added a final word to his composition. "Listen to this," he added, rising and holding the sheet of paper out in front of him.

"Golly, it's some of that limber Rick stuff," noted Legs, peeping over.

"We sure are getting poetry showers to-day. Sing on, oh muse!" Cat baited him.

"Shut up, listen," demanded Jimmy, "and then I'm with you—

"The Seaboard Airline Patrol
Has rescued a yacht from a shoal;
It has swatted a shark;
Winged a crook, on a lark,
And copped a Chief's bones in a hole."

"That's not rough on you like Hardy's stuff," approved Cat. "We'll send that to the paper for that write-up. Now, for home, boy, home and glory!"

And a few minutes later, the three merry scouts were having a hilarious time of it in the motor speeding homeward.

THE END

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